JOHN G. NEIHARDT

Man and Poet

JULIUS T. HOUSE

Annie H. Sanders

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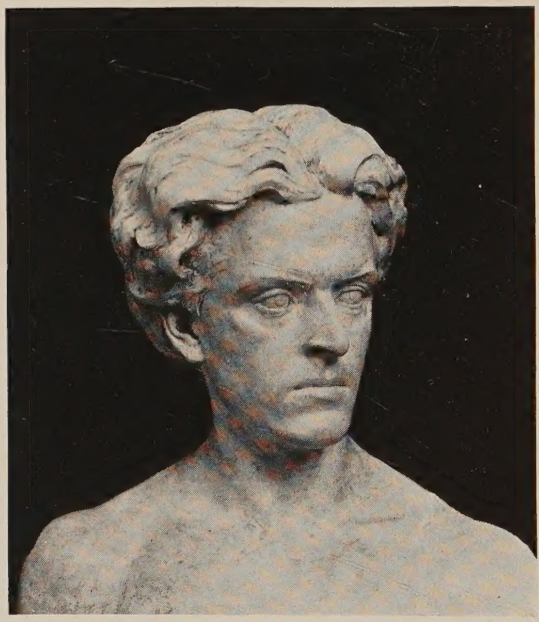

JOHN G. NEIHARDT

(From a bust made by his wife)

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Man and Poet

BY

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In Memory of

My Mother

Mary Sherman House

INTRODUCTION

THIS study was undertaken with the purpose of finding out how a man achieved distinction in one form of art. To learn this, it was necessary to discover the influences, social, economic and literary, that have touched the life of the subject, and his reactions thereto. Thus we are able to discern his philosophy and the means by which his personality developed and his instinct for workmanship took its direction, and to place some tentative estimate on his work.

Back of all large human achievement lies a philosophy of life, a feeling, however chaotic, for life-values. The early nineteenth century was dominated by the philosophical conceptions of Rousseau. Nature was deified and an eternal harmony alleged between man's instincts and his happiness. All the structure of society was, therefore, so much limitation upon human well being. Freedom was the watchword and freedom was, as Mill said, removal of obstacles.

The fiscal policy of England was dominated by this strange obsession growing out of a natural rebellion against the repressive policies that had prevailed. Freedom of trade, of contract, of thought, of literary expression, war against restraint, except what men found in vague "laws of nature,"

(laws of nature being in the main creations of the desires and prejudices of the individual), such conceptions controlled.

Such thinking gave us Wordsworth, with his introspective teachings about Nature; our own Bryant, much like him; Byron, always defying custom and exalting the ego; Shelley, the philosophical anarchist.

All the movements of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; political, industrial, literary, rested upon a pleasure-pain psychology and an Epicurean philosophy. For a time men went wild with the conception. Hedonism ran rampant, romanticism in literature, individualism in state and in industry sowed the wild oats that ripened into a harvest indeed!

Then a gradual reaction set in. The later Victorian era found a world plunged into profound misery, the inevitable outcome of individualism. Multiplication of machines with capitalistic ownership, revealed how inadequate for a complex industrial society was the romantic individualism of Rousseau.

In the current philosophy there was no way out. God, Nature, each had ruled in turn and Evolution as now conceived had not yet arrived. The later Victorian period fell into a profound pessimism concerning society. Carlyle, Hood, and Mrs. Browning lifted voice against the tendencies of capitalism, but with little immediate effect. Browning remained an optimist by resolutely

placing the values of life chiefly in another world. His optimism was that of one who goes into battle leading a charmed life, as Achilles may have felt in the armor forged by Vulcan. Such optimism is sentimental. If God has ordained victory, what becomes of heroism? Browning is not modern in the fullest sense. He is pre-evolutionary. He is a throwback toward the earlier nineteenth century romanticism.

Tennyson more nearly represents the later Victorians. There is a hint in him of the puzzle presented by a world of suffering as the result of a fiat of an Almighty and All-loving God. He gropes more than did Browning. For him the old order changeth with considerable sorrow.

The poet of this age will be one who has a feeling for conceptions that have come to society through later knowledge of the law of evolution. Not long since, men were declaiming that all forms of art had been displaced for all time by science. This belief was due to complete misapprehension of the nature of science itself. Science was held to be exact and unchangeable knowledge. The conception was as rigid and finalistic as Calvin's creed. "Soon," men said, "the world will be platted into geometrical forms, which will remain fixed as the hills." But are the hills fixed? "The Pythagorean theorem is the same," they said, "yesterday, today and forever." But that was before the days of the non-Euclidian geometry. Even mathematics grows, changes, evolves. Even science is

true only for today. Creative human energy changes the unchangeable, recreates the fixed categories of science.

A narrow conception of the nature of science saw this world as ruled by the laws of matter. Steam engines, automobiles and telephones, trade regulations, and the "dismal science" of political economy were the only real things. It was a day of fixed principles like free trade (how "free" indeed!), written constitutions, "right of contract," and selfish individualism. How foolish the conception!

Pray, what has happened to this strange materialistic world? We find at the heart of everything only one unchanging law—that all things change. Science stands abashed before life that flows around it, pours through it and transforms it! Science is only science because man created it out of his experience, recreates it to his need, casts it away as useless when outworn.

How foolish the conception that matter is the only reality while the purpose to which matter is plastic material, the ideals, is a phantom! If matter is real at all, it is because it is an expression of purpose, thought.

The later understanding of social evolution has given us the free will and with it a new feeling for life. The world has become dynamic because man is consciously and definitely an agent in the process, "a vortex of energy," to use Neihardt's own phrase.

Whether or not other poets have felt and represented the twentieth century feeling for life that has given us James in psychology, Dewey in philosophy and Ward and Small in sociology, at least the subject of this monograph is thrilled with the new feeling for life. To Neihardt life is fundamentally good because struggle is good. His works thrill with the glory of the struggle. To fight and conquer, "to go on forever a victor in the moment," is to live gloriously; but to fight and suffer defeat, to rise and fight again, is also glorious. The whole process is something splendid, divine. This is the key to a true understanding of the author. To trace the way by which he reached this feeling and gave it expression is the purpose of the following pages.

CHAPTER I

ONE

JOHN GNEISENAU NEIHARDT, son of Nicholas N. and Alice (Culler) Neihardt, was born in an unplastered, one-room house on a rented farm near Sharpsburg, Illinois, January 8, 1881. The poet has two sisters, both older than himself. Shortly after the birth of the son, the family moved to Springfield, Illinois, where they remained until the fall of 1886. The following year they spent at the home of the mother's parents, a farm in northwestern Kansas, nine miles from the town of Stockton, Rooks County. Pioneer conditions prevailed there, and the family residence was a sod house.

The five years from 1887 to 1892 were spent in Kansas City, Missouri. At the latter date they again moved, this time to Wayne, Nebraska.

In 1896, Neihardt completed the teachers' professional course of the Nebraska Normal College and, in 1897, the scientific course, the graduates of which were entitled to the degree of Bachelor of Science. In 1897 and 1898, he taught a country school eight miles north of the village of Hoskins, Nebraska. The following summer he tramped through Kansas and Missouri. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty he engaged in various occupa-

tions—farm hand, hod-carrier, clerk, office boy, marble-polisher, stenographer, teacher.

In 1900 the family moved to Bancroft, Nebraska, where they still live. In 1901, Neihardt was City Hall reporter for two months on the Omaha *Daily News*. For three years, dating from 1902, he assisted in the office of an Indian trader in Bancroft, his work being that of handling Indian land leases, collecting, etc. During this period he organized a stock company and purchased the Bancroft *Blade*, a weekly newspaper, and published it for one year.

In January or February of 1893, Neihardt began to write verse. "Who's Who in America," in which his name appeared for the first time in 1908, lists his literary work in 1920 as follows: The Divine Enchantment, 1900; The Lonesome Trail, 1907; A Bundle of Myrrh, 1908; Man-Song, 1909; The River and I, 1910; The Dawn-Builder, 1911; The Stranger at the Gate, 1912; The Death of Agrippina, 1913; Life's Lure, 1914; The Song of Hugh Glass, 1915; The Quest (collected lyrics), 1916; The Song of Hugh Glass, School Edition, 1919; The Song of Three Friends, 1919; The Splendid Wayfaring, 1920.

He married, in November, 1908, Mona, daughter of Rudolph Vincent Martinsen, a German-Russian financier connected with the firm of Boissevain & Company of Amsterdam, and for some years President of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad. Mrs. Neihardt is a sculptress, a pupil of the

late Auguste Rodin. Some of her work was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1907. There are three children: Enid, Sigurd and Hilda.

TWO

All American Neihardts are descendants of three brothers who settled in Pennsylvania in 1737. These brothers were the only remaining members of an old Bavarian family of the Palatinate, the founder of which, Conrad Neuthardt, was ennobled by Friederich Barbarossa and given large estates near Zweibruecken. At the city of Mainz, in 1498, the Neithardts received a coat-of-arms from Maximilian, "Roemischer Koenig," the heraldic description running as follows: "Three barbed roses gules, on a bend azure, on a field gules." During the Thirty Years War, when a great portion of Germany was laid waste, the family lost its holdings in the Palatinate and became impoverished. The minnesinger, Neithardt von Reuenthal, was a member of a collateral branch of the Zweibruecken family. It is interesting to note that Reuenthal represented the democratic tendency in the poetry of his time, having been the first to write *dorfpoesie* (village poetry). He was an uncompromising opponent of Walther von der Vogelweide, who represented the conservative literary tendencies of the time. It will be recalled that this ancient Neithardt accompanied the Bavarian army in the Fifth Crusade, taking his fiddle with him to Damietta. What is to an American vastly more significant

than this old world record, and what the subject of this monograph prizes infinitely more, is that in America the Neihardts have been in the forefront of pioneer movements from Pennsylvania to Oregon, and have been represented in all the wars of the country. Fourteen Neihardts were soldiers of the Revolution. Neihardt's father was a sergeant in the Spanish-American War. The family seems to have had a passion to share in adventures, to be pioneers.

During his stay in northwestern Kansas the future poet received his first impression of the compelling beauty of the prairies that with the years has more and more enthralled him. In 1887 that country was still exceedingly wild. The buffalo had vanished from its vast reaches only nine years before. While there, the boy saw a prairie fire that is reproduced in "The Song of Three Friends."

From the time he was six until he was twelve, it was accepted by the family and himself that he was to be an inventor. The back yard of the home in Kansas City was filled with a cable-car system of his construction, with tunnels, grades, and all else necessary. But poetry was not far away, for his father wrote verses before him, and used to entertain his son on rainy Sundays by writing rhymes about the boy's own world. Once the verses concerned a pony, and sometimes the "inventive genius" was sung.

That this inventiveness had some basis in reality is shown by the fact that at eleven years of age

John had planned a turbine engine, though he had never seen or heard of one. It happened in this way. He had developed considerable skill with a jack-knife, and had made some nicely modeled sailing ships with complete rigging, getting his knowledge of these matters from the back of the dictionary. At one time he had a fleet of warships armed with cannon made of brass shotgun shells. His boy friend, Frank Whitney, also had a fleet similarly armed; and they used to have great battles on a lake east of Wayne. They used powder and pebbles for ammunition, each firing a broadside in turn. The fleet that suffered the more, after a stipulated number of rounds, was considered defeated.

At length Neihardt grew weary of sailing vessels and desired a steamship. Realizing that he could not hope to make an engine in the regular way, he hit upon the idea of forcing steam against a fan. The idea evolved until he came to see the need of a graduated series of fans (enclosed in a funnel-shaped chamber) so that the decreasing power of the steam should work on a steadily increasing leverage. He had invented a turbine engine! A tinner could have made the engine, but the boy had no money to give a tinner. So the engine remained a dream sketched in a rude drawing and soon to be abandoned forever that he might follow the *Voice*. What if he had had the money! One might speculate here on free will and determinism.

When ten years old, and while the family still

lived in Kansas City, his father went out of the boy's life. He came at once into contact with the life of the wretched. The family suffered a poverty that was almost destitution. The experience bit deep. His mother supported herself and the children by working for fifty or seventy-five cents a day, though she could not always get work at any figure. But she kept the family respectable. The children were never allowed to be absent from school unless sick in bed. This heroic struggle brought its reward. The young people were all graduated from college and the young women became successful teachers. The mother lives in a house of her own in Bancroft and in the same yard with her son. The appreciation of these women is expressed in the poem "The Fool's Mother" and in the dedication of "The Quest":

To
The Women of My Family
Mighty givers, meagre takers,
Mother, sister, wife.

While living in Kansas City he conceived that admiration of the Missouri River that was the beginning of his interest in the history of the West. "I remember well the first time I looked upon my turbulent friend, who has since become as a brother to me. It was from a bluff at Kansas City. I know I must have been a very little boy, for the terror I felt made me reach up to the saving forefinger of my father, lest this insane devil-thing

before me should suddenly develop an unreasoning hunger for little boys.

"For the summer had smitten the distant mountains and the June floods ran. Far across the yellow swirl that spread out into the wooded bottomlands, we watched the demolition of a little town.

* * *

"Many a lazy Sunday stroll took us back to the river; and little by little the dread became less, and the wonder grew—and a little love crept in.

* * *

"If in a moment of despair I should reel for a breathing space away from the fight, with no heart for battle-cries, and with only a desire to pray, I could do it in no better manner than to lift my arms above the river and cry out into the big spaces, 'You who somehow understand—behold this river! It expresses what is voiceless in me. It prays for me!'"

Once, after a long monologue about the Missouri and its men, he suddenly exclaimed: "If I die before you do, I want my body cremated. Then I want you and some others who care for me to go out to a bluff top on the Missouri, repeat 'When I Have Gone Weird Ways', 'Envoi', and anything else that may seem appropriate, then scatter my ashes on the current by way of expressing my life-long devotion to that river." What Neihardt loves possesses him.

At the Nebraska Normal College in Wayne, Neihardt came under the influence of President

James M. Pile, an exceptional personality. Knowing that the family could not afford to pay even the small tuition fees of the institution, President Pile engaged the boy with the large head, speaking eyes and mobile face to ring the college bell, and incidentally to set a pace in the classroom for his more mature classmates of pioneer farmer boys and girls that they could scarcely equal. Twice every fifty minutes during the school day, which began at 6:30 A.M. and ended at 6:00 P.M., for nearly three years of forty-eight weeks each, Neihardt rang that bell, though often he had to come to school when the blizzards were blowing and the thermometer registered twenty-five degrees below zero.

Early Neihardt became acquainted with the elder gods. He read Latin easily, and was carried away by the music and imagery of the Æneid. While his comrades were puzzling out the grammar, and the professor was setting syntax traps for them, the small boy of the class was dreaming back old Troy and listening to the far murmur of the Simois as it "rolled along the shields and helmets and brave bodies of heroes swept beneath its waves." But he never talked of these visions. In the later years of his connection with the school, his teacher, U. S. Conn, now president of the fine state normal that has succeeded the old private institution, and whom Neihardt still holds in affection and gratitude, used to leave him in charge of the advanced classes in Latin, when called away to address educational gatherings. At this time

the youthful student was spending five hours a day on Latin; at fifteen he could read the Æneid at sight and was studying spherical trigonometry. His professional teacher's diploma, issued by the Normal College in 1896, was a first grade teacher's certificate.

THREE

This account of the life of the subject has not thus far followed a chronological order and even less will it do so in the remaining pages, for it is the story of the growth of a personality and its manifestation in the development of an art. We return to the summer when Neihardt was eleven years old. At that time he had a serious attack of fever, an experience that left a deep impress upon his spiritual life. In spells of delirium he seemed to be carried through upper space by some tremendous power. So swift was the flight that "the air became as glass beneath his speed." When the sense of movement became unbearable, he would cry out and his mother would soothe him. On his recovery the thought of being an inventor had gone and the "shaping dream" of being a poet had become the fixed idea that in all the years, no matter how hard the strain, has never for a moment left him. It was as if a Voice called him from his mechanical inventions, saying: "Come away. This is not the thing." Shortly thereafter he wrote his first verses, "The Stubble Haired Boy."

Intuitively he set about in the only possible way by which he could prepare to write poetry. He

began to read and to collect a library of cheap reprints of historical works and great English poetry. For years he read "much as a starved dog eats." He knew that only in that way could he find the real world. He knew that his town was not conscious of this real world. The first volume of poetry he ever owned was a paper-bound copy of the "Idylls of the King" secured as a premium for soap wrappers. One wonders how many jack-knives, Waterbury watches and other things that delight the heart of boyhood competed as possible premiums with that cheap edition of precious stuff that the poet still keeps in his library.

His first verses to appear in print were called "Ambition," and were published in the Cook County (Illinois) *News*. He was then nearly fourteen years old. The first poem for which he received pay was printed by the *Youth's Companion*. It was written in 1900 in a potato patch with the back of a hoe for a desk, and was called "The Song of the Hoe."

The extent and quality of his reading from this time forth reveal how one "member of the proletariat" got into the world stream of thought. He has been led far into the literature of many countries both ancient and modern. Somehow he found a way of learning what was worth reading. He read no modern books of pure literature until he was eighteen, having a positive horror of what might not be the best. The number of books so devoured was very large indeed and all became a

part of him, for he has a very genius for seizing what he needs and making it his own. This was, perhaps, the most significant part in his training for the large work he is now doing. Nevertheless, he was never a bookworm. Rather, from the beginning, for him the business of living was vividly interesting. He had a tremendous sense of being alive. He was in love with Being.

When fifteen, he had, in addition to many short pieces of verse, written two "epics" of about one thousand lines each. One, called "The Wizard of the Wind," concerned the realms of Orcus. Neihardt believes that this work was suggested by the descent of Æneas into Avernus, for by that time he had read six books of the Æneid in the original. The other poem was called "Tlingilla: An Epic of the Stone Age."

About this time he came under the influence of a town character known as "Professor" Durrin. This man was a maker of tombstones and an amateur sculptor. He boasted that he was an agnostic and was pointed at by the orthodox community as a horrible example, an "infidel," though I never learned of his doing anything very bad. It pleased this provincial to deride poetry and many were the hot disputes between the two. Judge James Britton, another local character of considerable acumen, was accustomed to speak with a good deal of amusement of the fiery, barefooted boy and the large man with a Raphael face, bushy hair, and eyes of an eagle, in hot dispute on themes

too deep for either. Neihardt yet speaks with a smile of the first time his god nodded approval of some lines from "The Divine Enchantment" and said wonderingly: "John, I don't see how you do it!" No praise of a great critic in later years, so he testifies, so stirred the poet.

Having completed the scientific course at the Normal, he went to work in the beet fields for fifty cents a day. He desired to attend the State University, but free education was not for him. The family was too poor for "free" education. Albeit, he did not lose touch with either the elder or the younger gods. He carried Tennyson in one pocket and Browning in the other. Also he was deep in Vedanta philosophy. This study was no mere boyish pose. It was genuine. Even today Neihardt is in closer sympathy with the consciousness of the Hindu than of the western Christian.

And now as he crawls upon his hands and knees, weeding and thinning the beets, his brain is busy with the great dream, the magnum opus, the masterpiece that shall justify his existence. It was called "The Divine Enchantment," and indeed it did cast a spell over the boy and a glory over the beet fields, the brown prairies and the sordid toil.

As soon as the beets were harvested he began the composition of the poem and continued the work while teaching country school eight miles north of Hoskins, Nebraska. It obsessed him. He often awoke suddenly at night with a line or two, got out of bed in the cold and, having no lamp

handy, fumbled for a pencil and scrawled the idea on anything near, for use in the morning.

The next summer he went with a chum, John Chaffee, to Kansas City, Missouri, hoping to get employment, but was disappointed in the hope. Away from home and out of work, he went most unwillingly on a "hobo" trip, and experienced much more of the wretchedness of life as millions know it. He begged, ate of the bitter bread of charity in Helping Hand Institutes, and was arrested as a vagrant and dismissed from jail without breakfast or money. On his arrival home after this gruelling experience he worked for a time on a farm, then taught country school for the second time and completed "The Divine Enchantment."

FOUR

Both the promise and the achievement of this first sustained effort are worthy of consideration. First, it is to be noted that the effort is indeed *sustained.* This mere fact is indicative of something. Many youths and maidens write verses more or less halting. Few devote two years to the production of one connected poem. The more modern psychology reveals of the nature of the instinct for workmanship, the more certain we become that the capacity to hold on is nearly sure to produce a "masterpiece of will."

A second consideration is that the work is concerned with cosmic things, but clearly expressed. The vague and misty rhetoric so common to youth-

ful endeavor is wholly wanting. Its philosophy is as clear as the source whence it springs. One who knows oriental thinking can understand every word of it.

Again, the prosody is good. It is clean-cut blank verse or excellent Spenserian stanza. The lines do not halt or limp. That fine musical quality that distinguishes his later work and the chaste concentration, are both evident. The poem is, therefore, more than a promise: it is an *achievement.* It reveals a sympathy with the universal and the elemental. In comparison with the earliest work of Keats or Byron it is superior in purpose and technique, and the early verses of Longfellow and Lowell are relatively insignificant. Follows the Interlude, written at seventeen, a section from "The Divine Enchantment":

INTERLUDE

As soars the cliff above the dusky vale
And laves its summit in the eastern glow;
Respeaking faintly some far song or wail
Unto itself and to the mist below;
Thus would I soar and meet the Morning so,
And thus, though stone-like, echo a far cry;
More kindred to the dusk that clings below
Than to the glory of the Morn, thus I
Revive a fainting voice, where many echoes die.

The perfume of the lotus dies away
And sunflowers smile their broad, plebeian smile;
No bulbul steals my willing sense to-day,
But on the fence the blackbird brawls the while;
The world moves conscious of the jealous dial;
The sun drags senseless, where once Surya sprang;
And so I speak with self-condemning smile
In heavy words, that once, light-wingéd, sang
And twang a rusty string, where once a lyre rang!

Those brain-flowers subtle Fancy rears to bloom,
Yet rarely blow in beauty on the lip;
Unchilled by death and fearless of the tomb,
Tho' sable Kala, frowning darkly, dip
His shafts in liquid flame Raskchasos sip,
These blooms I plant in more unkindly sod;
Yet doth a pigmy scarce presume to skip
Along the Blue; nor with Earth's metal shod,
Essay to take the charmed, bright footprints of a god!

Succeeding ages lower drag the skies,
And heavens dwindle as the seasons wane.
In vain we lift to thee, O Brahm, our eyes;

And hosts of worn-out gods are sought in vain.
Jehovah toils to break Trimourti's reign;
(Wert thou eternal I would call to thee).
O Arbiter of Orbits, joy and pain,
Who art the one unfathomed, restless Sea,
O Nameless Source, now breathe a lotus charm on me!

On the flyleaf of a copy of this book presented by Neihardt to the author of this monograph is written the amusing comment: "Exhibit A in the case of Posterity against John G. Neihardt." A few years after its publication, the poet burned nearly all of five hundred copies that remained. "They kept the kitchen stove going for about two weeks," he once remarked. Also, wherever he finds a copy in circulation, he buys and destroys it.

Shortly after the completion of "The Divine Enchantment," Neihardt worked for over a year on a long poem in Spenserian stanza called "The Twilight Gods." It was a big plan. He intended to have all the gods that have ever been, pass before him in review. Nearly two hundred stanzas were written. Thus the tendency to attempt the long, philosophical poem becomes evident. From the age of fifteen to the age of nineteen, the poet tried his hand at four "epics" and completed all but "The Twilight Gods"—a somewhat staggering endeavor, and one from which much might be augured.

FIVE

Were this section to receive a title, it would be "Dawning Success." That would mean success in the narrow sense of prestige, popularity, and increase in income. But to the thoughtful person the important matter is not these outward things, but rather the reaction of the subject to these details. It is to the development of his personality in this period of Neihardt's life that we now address ourselves.

"A Bundle of Myrrh" was completed in 1906. It was the product of occasional inspirations during a period of five years, and was unconsciously arranged in a sequence. The latter fact is characteristic of the poet, who is always first a thinker. He found that, unconsciously, he had been asking himself: "What is life? What does this or that experience mean to me, to others?" The book was circulating in manuscript in New York and making many friends. Through Louis V. Ledoux, the poet and critic, it fell into the hands of the late Volney Streamer, curator of the Players' Club and at one time a member of Edwin Booth's company. Streamer was deeply impressed, and paid the young poet the compliment of going all the way from New York to Bancroft to make his acquaintance. A sincere friendship sprang up between the two.

During this period "The Lonesome Trail," a collection of short stories, the result of Neihardt's

intimate acquaintance with the Omaha Indians, was being brought out by the John Lane Company. On invitation by Volney Streamer and Louis V. Ledoux, the young poet made a visit to New York in January, 1907, and was received as one whose career was likely to be phenomenal.

The following summer was passed in the Black Hills in study of early times there. "Life's Lure" was the product of this experience.

In January, 1908, "A Bundle of Myrrh" was published by the Outing Publishing Company. The letter of acceptance stated that "when poetry comes in at the front door the whole office force usually goes out at the back door," yet they felt that they were obliged to publish the "Bundle" because so vital and so original. At that time books of verse were nearly unsalable and were published at the authors' expense except in the case of poets already famous. Yet "A Bundle of Myrrh" was published on a royalty basis.

Readers of that volume will remember that portions of it were written in chant form. During the time Neihardt was working on these poems and for several years after their publication (that is to say, from 1902-1908), he was an enthusiast on this theory of verse construction, as a result of his admiration for the primitive poetry of the Indians. There is extant a series of letters between Neihardt and Ledoux, then a man in his twenties, in which Neihardt defends the theory of *vers libre* against the onslaughts of his friend, whom he considered

"academic." The very term *vers libre* was then unknown in America and when the "Bundle" appeared not one of the school, now so numerous, of writers of free-form verse had ever been heard of. When, a year or so later, Mr. Ledoux collected these letters and arranged them for book publication, Neihardt received the manuscript for examination and found that he had already outgrown the whole mood of the letters he had written and had come to agree substantially with the attitude of his former opponent. It will thus be seen that Neihardt's conspicuous devotion to the more difficult forms of verse is not the result of prejudice or natural conservatism, but rather of an evolution of which this change was one of many phases. His present opposition to free-form verse is the outgrowth of a philosophical development out of the anarchistic period of youth into the larger consciousness of social relations.

The reception of this slender volume by the press and the critics was a well-nigh universal shout of praise. Comparison to the works of Keats, Wordsworth, Sidney Lanier and to the Song of Solomon was the usual note. Ten years later the New York *Times* had a front page article concerning the volume of Neihardt's collected lyrics called "The Quest" in which it mentioned the earlier volume: "Everyone recalls 'A Bundle of Myrrh'. It contained lyrics that have not been equalled by any of our modern poets. Titan-Woman, Let Down Your Hair, Recognition, etc., are flawless and unforget-

table." Such a reception of poetry by a world never obsessed with beauty and in an age apparently peculiarly callous to any form of the beautiful, was enough to turn the head of a youth not level-headed indeed.

Nor was such popularity confined to his verse. His short stories had considerable vogue. When "The Alien," one of these stories, was published, many of the leading magazines wrote asking for another "Alien." To one of these Neihardt replied that there was only one "Alien." One of the higher class magazines continued for years, after Neihardt quit writing stories, to ask him for more of these, saying "When are you going to give us another story? No one writes the kind you can write." He wrote no more short stories, and probably never will.

Why, with financial ease and fame before him, with opportunity to write occasional lyrics, did he not continue and become known as one of America's great short-story writers? The answer is: Neihardt. He must follow the Voice.

All through adolescence he suffered from severe and profound melancholy and was haunted by a conviction that he was doomed to early death. His time was short. The night was coming. He must get his work done. Making all allowances for the romantic attitude of youth, it is yet true that the conviction that he was "doomed to be poet forever" was the deepest thing in his life. Explaining this attitude at this time he once said: "I developed a tremendous ego, but it was a matter of self-

preservation. All poets, all who accomplish by being different, must develop egoism. When I assert myself, boldly praise something I have done, it is never self-love, but self denial that speaks. Have I not given a life to my work? Could I not get more immediate comfort for less effort? And would I not willingly die a pauper if I could thereby further my work? My assertion, that may disgust the unwise, is merely by way of accelerating my dynamo, so that the work may not fail. It is a weapon hurled at *momentary doubt.* Deep down I am humble enough, but only to what I conceive to be the enduring values." These enduring values called upon him to cease writing short stories and to devote his life to poetry.

SIX

In the summer of 1908 Neihardt descended the Missouri River in an open boat from Fort Benton to Sioux City, a low-water distance of about two thousand miles. He celebrated this adventure in "The River and I," which a writer in *The Bookman* has aptly characterized as "that almost mystical yet thoroughly human love affair." In the fall of that year he was married. From 1908 to 1912 his greatest lyrics were written. "Man-Song" was hailed as a distinct advance upon "A Bundle of Myrrh" both in material and in technique. "The Stranger at the Gate" is acclaimed by many as having some of the finest lyrics in the language. In 1912 he became literary critic of the Minneapolis

Journal, reading ten books and writing seven columns each week. His literary page was an immediate success, a fact demonstrated by a sudden and otherwise unexplained increase in the sales of the Sunday edition. Yet after about a year of such work, Neihardt requested that he be paid a smaller sum for less writing, and that he be allowed to do this at his home in Bancroft. The request was granted, and since that time he has lived constantly in his Nebraska home with his family, his garden, his books, and his Muse.

He now found himself under the inward necessity of settling upon a scheme of life, a guiding principle by which his days and years, his every thought and activity, should be controlled. Neihardt, as has been said, is before all a thinker, and under a compulsion to obtain an ordered and reasoned life. He thought of himself as a "vortex of social energy." Unless he could hold right relations to the race this energy might be wasted or even destructive.

In order to establish this connection, he had recourse to the principle of recapitulation. He asked himself: "What are the fundamental values which all men seek? If I can realize them in my own life I shall have a sympathetic understanding of human life in the mass and so be enabled to interpret men to themselves." These values are certainly those of production and procreation. In the former, man has realized the satisfaction of his instinct for workmanship, in the latter he has developed his sentiments. The poet might well, then, produce food, come into

contact with the earth, have calloused hands, conquer the soil and so unite himself with all the producers of all ages. Neihardt's love of out door life made this easy. Physically he is very strong. He is a fine swimmer, has skill with a rifle, and, as his boyhood story reveals, with tools. He finds it possible to tend a large garden, from the produce of which much of the family support is derived.

As the second step in achieving right relations with humanity, the poet must be an efficient husband and parent. This is as definite and detailed a part of his plan of life as is his productive endeavor. Nothing is neglected, the family store is carefully husbanded, means are wisely spent, the education of the children is constantly in mind. In all these matters he has the intelligent and industrious cooperation of his wife, a woman of a rare genius of appreciation.

But the race has achieved other values than these of food and sex. How shall the poet know those? By the study of world literature—literature in the broadest sense, including history, philosophy, the social sciences as well as the more distinctly æsthetic side. Neihardt speaks much of the racial memory, by which he means the associations evolved through ages of intellectual achievement. These establish racial continuity and give us a sense of the kinship of humanity. In the preface to the first edition of "The Song of Three Friends" he says: "But what we call the slow lapse of ages is but the blinking of an eye. Sometimes this close

sense of the unity of all time and all human experience has come upon me so strongly that I have felt, for an intense moment, how just a little hurry on my part might get me there in time to hear Æschylus training a chorus, or to see the wizard chisel still busy with the Parthenon frieze, or to hear Socrates telling his dreams to his judges."

As part of the task, he began, at the age of thirty, the study of Greek. He wished to get the Greek feeling for life because of its fine quality and especially, as being representative of that feeling, he wished to study Æschylus. He once said that "all great poetry has the Æschylus principle, that of stern masculinity, both in material and form, as though the lines had been beaten out of iron, not molded from wax, as though life were storm, not calm." In order to get the feeling of a passage as a whole, he would carefully work out the constructions and master the meters until he could read all rapidly and realize its beauty as a living piece of literature. Thus, for a time, he became a Greek, "being, as it were, a listener in the theatre."

Once more, and as the final phase of the system of control of his personal life, he must enter into the life of his own day. It is part of the law of evolution that each age adds something of its own to the past. The poet must reveal not only the permanent, the elemental, but also that inflection of life that is peculiar to his own age. To achieve this, Neihardt utilizes his task as literary editor of the Minneapolis *Journal*. In the past eight years he has read crit-

ically substantially every great book, and many not great, on social and philosophical subjects, and possibly no one outside the specialists is better informed as to current thought on these themes. He was among the first to recognize the social significance of John Elof Boodin's "A Realistic Universe" and to place that philosopher correctly in the succession after Bergson.

With the foregoing in mind, we can now see Neihardt a master of his own life, so far as a man can be triumphant over the uncertainties of earthly affairs. In detail, he spends three forenoons each week writing reviews and criticisms, the afternoons he spends in his garden, or, in winter, in chopping wood or reading Greek. Four forenoons he spends with his epics. And, with it all, he keeps a reserve of energy by which he rejoices in the beauties of sky and earth, night and day, and is sensitive to atmospheric conditions. He knows his prairies as Homer knew his Ægean sea. Who, then, is better fitted by his personal experiences to continue the line of descent from the bards of old, revealing the common heart of humanity, or who is a better democrat to find the heroic and beautiful in a world bereft of kings and demi-gods?

"—As for me, a cracker box and enough food to keep me going. But half of a poet's job is that of being a real he-person, and that is one good reason why I am increasingly glad for my responsibilities. So far, I've done the trick by the simple expedient of producing necessities instead of fighting for

money with which to buy them—that is, to a great degree. Soon the world will learn that money is only a medium of exchange! It has temporarily forgotten; and so it has gone after the representation of things rather than the things. How money has fooled the human animal! 'For the means of living to forfeit the purpose of life.' Sometimes I have an overpowering vision of our world making industry an end instead of a means—and it is terrible."

Nor has our author failed to establish a connection between this philosophy of life and his art. The struggle to become a man and that of becoming an artist were of one piece. An illustration of this is found in the circumstances connected with the poem "Nemesis." It represents a crisis reached and passed. It was written when he was about twenty-eight. Explaining the psychology of the experience he once said: "There comes a time in the life of a poet when he must either widen or desert the field of his earlier endeavor—when he must strike out anew. This crisis is occasioned by a change of attitude toward the world that every developing man must experience. It is a difficult test for the poet who, if he is to remain a poet, must manage to retain that spontaneous enthusiasm which is his peculiar power, while accepting a less exalted, though not necessarily a less noble, conception of things. If in the adjustment to the new outlook, that power of enthusiasm is lost, the poet dies, though the man may, through force of habit, continue poetizing to a gray old age—a ghastly and profitless

industry." This he followed with the assertion that the crisis in his own experience was due to the unconscious effort to pass from the subjective to the objective, from the rule of caprice to that of Law. At this time he knew definitely that he must not continue to write lyrics. What was he to do? During a spell of depression induced by this problem, he conceived that his escape might be in writing a drama, a more objective form of literature than the lyric, and he then planned a play having for its theme the French Revolution. The play was never written, but one of the choruses became the poem "Nemesis," the first wholly objective lyric by the author.

The poem proved to be what he sought, a way of escape, the beginning of a new and infinitely larger development both of his personality and of his art. He saw, outside his subjective self, Law; and ever since the search for every manifestation of law has been a passion. To bring his life under the domination of Law, to find law both in the form and materials of his art, and by submission thereto to find the freedom whereby his personality and his art shall grow and achieve expression—this is the secret of all his later development.

SEVEN

Out of his experience he has formed a religion, if religion be defined as a passionate yearning to be right with the cosmos, in harmony with the ever evolving universe. His conversation, his writings,

his life overflow with this spirit. It is true that he has never been a Christian in any accepted sense, but one can but feel that he would have listened to the actual living Jesus with far better understanding than most. Nevertheless, he has sought to come into contact with the spiritual realities by immediate experience rather than by the medium of authority. Probably few in a generation have such intimate feeling of communion with the sources of inspiration as has Neihardt. In boyhood, in times of great discouragement, he was accustomed to lie with his face pressed close to the earth and consciously to seek the strength that came to him from this "mother of mothers." No saint ever prayed more constantly for the presence of the Purifying Power than Neihardt seeks for contact with the sources that make life and art sincere and great. The following from a letter written while he was at work on "The Three Friends" will illustrate his attitude. As will be shown later, it is also the deepest note in his lyric poetry.

"It's curious about this writing game. Ordinarily, it seems to me that I force the epic along at will. But this week I have evidently struck a snag. Of course, I will overcome it nicely; but it goes to show that I'm not the whole thing by any means. I feel just as I always feel; just as keen to write, and I have everything as clearly in mind as ever. But the lines hang back. Often at such times I discover that it was necessary to wait until some new and very important sidelight could be discovered

before going ahead. It's very odd. I tell you, Doctor, we don't know very much about this world. I believe more and more that a man working with merely his own conscious abilities doesn't get anywhere. *Something helps* in the accomplishment of any work that is unusual. There are times when one simply isn't connected properly with the real source of power. I mean this in a matter of fact way, not in any superstitious sense at all. When we 'die', most of us are going to have the surprise of our lives. So I think, anyway.

"I won back some of my self-respect today. Got some satisfactory lines with the promise of more tomorrow. Some really good lines! Last week there was a cruel frost on Parnassus!

"Fact is, I was deserted for nearly a month, though I fought hard to push ahead by sheer will power. Nothing doing. Then *It* came back, and I could work without any noticeable effort."

Not unlike many prophetic personalities, he has a sense that he is the special charge of some personality in a spirit world, who speaks through him, whenever he does his best work. At times he has almost an oriental fear of offending this spirit, of committing a sin against his own Holy Ghost. Some day the world may attach more significance than it now does to the daemon of Socrates and to this sense of communion with beings in other worlds that so often takes possession of great and sane persons.

This feeling in Neihardt's case has grown out of

a remarkable series of events that are here related in sequence. The first incident in the series is the fever-dream, referred to previously, in which he had the sense of being borne through space at such speed that the ether seemed like glass upon which he was sliding. When awake he wanted his mother to hold him to prevent a repetition of the dread experience. The dream itself is ordinary enough, being a familiar thing to those in fever. He was then eleven years old. The second incident in the series is that, within four months, his world of mechanics, his turbine engine and the rest, had lost all power over him and that, without an apparent reason, but with a sense of compulsion, he began to write verse and even to feel that for him life must mean to be a poet or a failure.

The third incident is that soon after he began writing verse he found that, whenever he felt especially satisfied with an achievement or with the world as it is, something seemed to take the joy of it away. It was as if some personality, vaguely felt, would say, "Come away from this. It isn't the thing." That sense deepened for years until about 1909, shortly after his marriage, he told his wife of the matter and she urged that he write a poem about it. However, he felt that this could not be done because the theme was too vague.

The fourth point is that about two years later, in 1911, he arose one morning with a strong desire to write a poem on that subject and he wrote "The Ghostly Brother." It is to be noted

that the poem vividly recalls the dream of his boyhood:

> "I am weary with the flight
> Through the speed-cleft awful night!"

And it is also to be noted that he now definitely conceives of the influence that has always been calling him away as having the personality of a brother.

Now comes a final event that seems to draw the several incidents together and to give them the rank of a psychic phenomenon of the first importance. In the spring of 1912, on his way east, he visited a clairvoyant medium in Omaha, for he had become interested in psychic research and, to use his own phrase, was "always willing to appear a fool if thereby he might learn something." She was an illiterate woman whom he had never seen before and who could not possibly have known him. Nor is he one to be cajoled into giving information unconsciously. So startling were the results of the meeting that immediately after leaving the clairvoyant he made a carefully written note of what she had said, thus avoiding any tendency to exaggeration. What she told him ran substantially as follows: "Let me feel your hand. You vibrate like a musician. No, you are not a musician. Your work is concerned with influencing persons at a distance. You have many friends over the country here and there whom you do not know, but whom you influence." At this point she suddenly stopped and, looking over his head, exclaimed, "Why, your

brother is standing behind you." "But I have no brother." Seeming not to notice this interruption, but pausing now and then as if to listen, she continued: "Your brother is standing behind you. He is tall, has dark hair and dark eyes (Neihardt is small and a blonde); he was a Scotch minister and died a long while ago. He says that when you were eleven years old you had a fever and nearly died, that you were often out of the body, and that he then got control of you and has controlled you ever since." As already noted, it was shortly after his fever that Neihardt began to write verses, and in the poem mentioned he had already conceived of the influence, that had often led him, as a brother. Thus, by the clairvoyant, seemingly unrelated incidents, covering a period of twenty years, were linked one to another to make, to say the least, a very curious psychological experience.

Naturally one with so close a sense of the invisible is much interested in the question of the persistence of the ego after death. The theme has endless fascination for him. Once he poured forth with much eagerness something about as follows: "What possible discovery would be so important as the fact of immortality! It would give men a new attitude. They would come to see values aright. Individualism would perish, for all would see that personal and social values merge. Ultimately, men would perceive that loyalty to the cosmic process, or as much of it as we can see, is necessary. I sometimes feel that there are those in another world that sur-

rounds and interpenetrates the world of sense who are trying desperately to tell us how all our values are upside down and who want to help us in putting them right." In conversation he often seems to speak the language of "special providence"; but his is not the usual thought concerning providence, an interference with the cosmic process in behalf of a particular individual. It is rather that some power uses the creative energies of the person to social ends.

EIGHT

The reader would know something of the way in which Neihardt works. He is, like Robert Louis Stevenson, "one of the few people in the world who remember their own lives." While he does not consciously note details for use in writing, and in fact, so far as his conscious mind is concerned, seems to himself to heed them very little, yet when need is, he finds innumerable details out of his personal experience, photographed, as it were, on his mind. Thus, if he writes of a sunset, it is a sunset that he has seen, and for him at the moment of writing it is scarcely to be called a memory; it exists. Hence it is not strange that of the many sunsets in "Hugh Glass" no two are alike.

Often a picture that has impressed him gives the phrase needed. The lines describing Hugh's delirious fancy of Jamie,

> "And now serenely beautiful and slain
> The dear lad lies within a gusty tent,"

were suggested by a picture of the death of Absalom seen in early childhood. In writing the "Death of Agrippina" the phrase:

"Dazzle the moony hollows of the dead"

came to him in his sleep. He seemed to be looking at a picture. In a vague way this dream scene was associated with a painting, "The Isle of Death."

Occasionally bits of poetry have come to him in sleep. At such times it seems to him that some one is reading from a fine poem, something clean, intricate and long. When he awakes, for him the poem *exists*. Bits here and there he may be able to recall and he has a sense of searching, not of composing.

About daylight one morning in 1912, he awoke remarking to his wife: "A fellow was just now reading me a perfectly ripping thing." He came out of his sleep with a sense of the dynamic scheme of the entire poem. The rhymes ran as follows:

1	a	3	c
	b		a
	a		c
	b		a
2	b	4	a
	c		b
	b		a
	c		b

There was an echoing of sounds within the lines, all echoes coming back until they merged into the original sounds. Though he had a feeling of having heard four stanzas, he never was able to recall more than one:

Swirled with the dust in the wake of a
world that is strange,
The croon of the rain has the pain of an
old tune for me;
And thunderful murmurs foretell me the
wonderful change,
When I shall be lost in the tempest and
tossed in the heave of the sea.

For some months he tried to recall the other three stanzas. It seemed as if he must find them. The dynamic scheme he later used in the "Hymn Before Birth" in the volume "The Stranger at the Gate."

In 1917 he had a similar experience, which he related in a letter to the author of this monograph.

"I had a very pleasant experience this morning at about half past five o'clock. Thought I'd tell you about it right away.

"I was sound asleep and thought I was reading to Mona from a printed book of verse for which in some way I seemed responsible. What I read gave me the mood one gets from absolutely satisfying poetry. I know it was great stuff by the mood. Then Mona woke me and said 'Don't you think we ought to start a fire?' And what I had to say to her was this:

"'—and Luxury sleeping strawless!'

It is a fragment of the last portion of a perfectly ripping stanza I had been reading to her! It's pure Æschylean. As you will gather, the poem was concerned with some sudden wide-spread calamity; and *isn't* it a picture of some such thing? Before

Mona 'woke me, I had just paused to say, 'You know this is supposed to have been written by a poet of Nero's time.'

"If I could have slept fifteen minutes more! For actually I was *reading*. It was *there*. But when I was suddenly hustled into wakefulness, all I could grab was that little handful I have given you.

"Enough of this. I had to tell you, because it always makes me happy when I find poetry in my sleep. I haven't had the experience for a long time."

Commenting on this experience he once said to me: "Wouldn't it be great if old Æschylus were hanging about here!"

In another portion of this monograph is a discussion of his theory of the epic. Here we will speak of his growing sense of form as found in his lyrics. Note should be made of the fact that every sentence is clean and clear. The condensation is marked, yet there are no obscurities. Again the rhymes are never *false*. Five hundred years hence a reader will know absolutely the correct pronunciation in this day of every rhyming word employed by Neihardt. Of few poets of any time may these things be truthfully said. Increasingly his work is musical, the images are vivid and consistent. But all this does not produce rigidity. Occasionally a shortened line or a shifted accent gives tremendous emphasis. Sentences begin and end in a normal way. All this sounds simple, but its achievement is unusual. Surely the reader has as much right to a clear cut sentence in verse as in prose.

The writer once mentioned to Neihardt his distaste for the verb form "do beat" in a popular sonnet, and asked whether the poem could be reconstructed so as to avoid that use. "There are fifty ways to write it," he said. "There is no excuse for padding." He thereupon, by changing some words that come earlier in the sonnet, not only corrected the offending verb form but greatly improved the whole line.

By the time he began to write his third volume of poems, the author had become profoundly interested in the problem of technique. In it he experimented much, though keeping in mind the achievements of the past. The "Prairie Storm Rune" is a remarkable instance of the use of *onomatopoeia*, wholly avoiding the bizarre effects of such work as Poe's "Bells," but achieving a far more perfect use of sound to convey the whole meaning of the poem.

The phrasing of poetry is based upon the natural length of a breath. By making the phrase much longer than the natural breathing length the sense of monotony is produced. Thus:

> The sunflowers stare through the hush
> at the glare
> Of the face of their tutelar god, and the
> hair
> Of the gossamer glints in the listless air.

The distant storm is indicated by long undertones:

> What mean yon cries where the flat world
> dies
> In hazy rotundity—

Tumult a-swoon, silence a-croon,
Lapped in profundity—bane or boon
Or only the drone of a fever rune?

As the storm approaches we have a succession of short sounds:

Haunting the distance with taunting insistence
Fiery portents and mumblings of wonder!
In gardens of gloom, walled steep with doom,
Strange blue buds burst in thunder, and bloom
Dizzily, vividly, gaudily, lividly—
Death-flowers sown in a cannon-gloom.

The next to the last line of the above will be seen to have the movement of great gashes of lightning.

Again the shifting of the length of lines, and of the rhymes gives the sense of confusion as the storm breaks:

Bloody light from the sword-slashed night—
Shuddering darkness after!
Terrible feet trample the wheat!
Olympian laughter overhead!
Over the roofs rumble the hoofs,
Over the graves of the dead.

In the following lines from "Nemesis" the movement indicates the approach of horses at various speeds, the last two lines representing a gallop.

By star or sun I creep or run,
And lo, my will was sped
By the might of the Mede, the hate of
the Hun
The bleak northwind of the Goth.

One who meets Neihardt at all intimately comes to realize that without the help of the schools he has attained scholarship; certainly so, if by that term we mean the sense of kinship with the race, control by reason, appreciation of value. His reading is wide and systematic, his judgments independent and reasoned, his knowledge, both of contemporaries and of the past, sufficient for all his needs. Supremely he has the attitude of the true scholar, a forward-reaching for more and more Truth.

It was fitting that he who achieved his education in comparative isolation should receive the recognition of the University of his own state. In June, 1917, the regents of the University of Nebraska voted him the degree of *Litterarum Doctor*, and Chancellor Samuel Avery conferred the degree. There is comfort for all who strive in this recognition by his home people. The "town" has become aware of the poet even during his early manhood, and his quiet home in Bancroft is pointed out to the passing traveler. Surely

A wakeful glory
Clings round you as you doze.

Yet neither this recognition nor even that of future generations of the John Neihardt who ate

and slept and lived in Bancroft any longer inspires his life. Rather it is his work, the desire that it be accomplished. He sees that the ego is nothing in itself. "What am I, John Neihardt? It matters not whether the world knows my name. What matters is that I or some one should do this work. The individual must be lost in the mass. I am willing, eager to give up my ego, even the memory of my name that my work may be done." This is his testimony, not in sudden rhetorical heat, but in sober word and in years of ceaseless toil.

Indeed, by long labor it is true that

> The winds of the cosmic struggle
> Made of his flesh a flute
> To echo the tune of a whirlwind rune
> Unto the million mute.

CHAPTER II

WHEN in 1916 the Macmillan Company published his collected lyrics, Neihardt had become so conscious that the poems constituted a sequence and were directed to a special purpose that he determined to call the volume "The Quest." This title is an assertion that the arrangement of the poems is not accidental; that they are directed to the production of one great mood, the feeling of a search for the meaning of life. In a sense the volume is, as one of its critics has said, "an epic of the individual soul."

The sense of search may be found in the first poem, "Lines in Late March." The youth, as he had done in boyhood, is whistling, but for the first time he is self-conscious concerning his expression of joy in mere physical existence.

"I whistle. Why not?"

No boy ever asks why he whistles or goes barefooted in the spring. It is youth, with its yearning, that asks that question.

Then in the next poem we have the first wonder that comes with the consciousness of power over woman. Here is a new mystery. The youth is amazed, overwhelmed by the discovery. He is a "witless musician," she his violin. How complex,

how delicate, how divine this human violin! How exalted the musician whose power is first realized! And yet

> I only feel that song which I have awakened mysteriously.

Here we have what we always find in Neihardt, a feeling for that which is beyond analysis, the elusive, that part of life that flows all around us and through and beyond, ever escaping the effort to grasp and hold it.

Masters of language are those who most feel its inadequacy to express the deepest emotions. Sometimes they find the new word, but even then full expression is not attained. Emotion ever runs beyond the limits of words.

> I would I knew some slow soft sound to call you.

Here is the quest for a word—"fit and simple and sufficient." It is beyond the power of human speech to shape it. Still it is breathed in the "night wind and the rush of the rain," and the poet has heard the sound. Nature is full of it, but no human voice shall ever shape it. Mankind goes on adding word to word, but the story is never told, it is always just beyond.

It is the custom with some biographers and critics to probe for the secrets of the poet in order to account for each poem—nay, each line. Within limits this method is perhaps justified. Sometimes one

fancies that the whole of the volume, "A Bundle of Myrrh," centers about one woman or young girl who early passed out from the author's life, perhaps by death. At any rate there is a woman there of unspeakable tenderness. At parting, "the hours grow empty one by one." There is the suggestion of a quarrel and desire for her return:

> Of old I saw the sunlight on the corn,
> The wind-blown ripple running on the wheat;
> But now the ways are shabby and forlorn
> That knew your feet.

Is there better expression of the meaning of dear associations than the following?

> I wonder if the skies would be so blue,
> Or grass so kindly green as 'twas of old,
> Or would there be such freshness in the dew
> When purple mornings blossom into gold:
> I wonder would the sudden song of birds,
> Thrilling the storm-hushed forest dripping wet
> After a June shower, be as idle words,
> Should we forget.
>
> I wonder if we'd feel the charm of night
> Divinely lonesome with the changing moons:
> Or would we prize the intermittent light
> Burning the zenith with its transient noons.

I wonder if the twilight could avail
To charm us, as of old when suns had set,
If all these many dream-sweet days
should fail—
And we forget.

It is not surprising in one who, at an impressionable age, had read much of Eastern philosophy that the experiences of passion should suggest the age-long dream of reincarnation. I knew you, you were mine; but for endless eons we were separated! Let us seize the moment. The high note in "Retrospect" and "Recognition" is reached by a most skillful playing upon this sense that the loved one has been lost and shall certainly soon be lost again.

The bony Terror! Hark his muffled
drums!
Let us be drunken when the Victor
comes!

Later this sense of unity with nature through endless reincarnations merges into something less egoistic. It ceases to demand personal gratification, being content to share unconsciously the life of the cosmos or, disembodied, to go on in the search for truth. One is greater when self is forgotten and the subjective is lost in the objective.

Indeed, it is clear from the very beginning of the erotic period that mere eroticism has not charms that last. Perhaps the most complete defiance of social as compared with sense joys is found in "If This Be Sin." Yet even in that poem there is by no means absent the pull of the conscience. The fact

that most of the poem is put in the form of interrogation reveals it as a mood, not a deep-seated philosophy. Again, in "Recognition," even in the wildest tumult of passion, its justification is sought in the transiency of life!

> Death is near
> And I shall lose you once again, my dear.

Further, any impression of a merely hedonistic view of life wrought by the earlier poems of "A Bundle of Myrrh" is corrected by the deepening sense of the social meaning of sex in the succession. "Let Down Your Hair" has a note of inexpressible sadness, a consciousness of loss irreparable. It is not by accident that this poem is so soon followed by "Titan-Woman," "a lover and a mother," that

> . . . canst wrap me close and make me dream
> As one not cursed with light.
> I shall forget my flesh,
> This flesh that burns and aches
> And fevers into hideous, shameless deeds!

Then one after the other, in clear sequence and waxing to a climax, come "The Ancient Story," "The Last Altar," "Resurrection," "A Vision of Woman," each repudiating mere animal love, sounding successive notes of highest spiritual perception until the climax comes in "Gaea, Mother Gaea!" From that point on we know that

"All the mad spring revelling is gone
And now—the wise sweet summer!"

The youth has fought his way through. The poet is now just ready for the great creative period. The technique of versification has been thoroughly mastered, and a genuine philosophy of life in one of its major phases has been reached. It is the story of the wrestlings of youth, it places value upon fiery experience and issues in serene and powerful manhood.

However, we may not pass the study of these erotic poems without noting especially the great force that, even in the wildest bursts of passion, draws the poet back to the normal. It is his feeling for the forms and spirit of nature. This feeling recurs again and again as an accompaniment or tone of a poem, but first becomes the theme itself in "Longing," an early poem of the volume.

Far from the bitter grin of human faces
I could sing:
Robed in the vast and lonesome purple
spaces
Like a king.

Into nature he places all his moods and from her always receives strength. There is something mystic about this love of the earth and the communion of the poet with her. The life of all comes from her, but with Neihardt there is an ever present consciousness of her as the source of his own individual being. In her he would lose himself. He rushes forward to embrace her though his life be dissolved in

her arms. To the writer, no other like Neihardt gives a sense of Nature as the nourishing Mother—the dear Comforter, the one through whom and in whom life comes to fruition and to peace. Many times the "Titan-Woman" has dispelled the sense of defeat, the feeling that all experience is but broken fragments, and put in place thereof supreme confidence in its meaning and its wholeness.

O Great kind Night,
Calm Titan-Woman Night!
Broad-bosomed, motherly, a comforter
of men!
Reach out thy arms for me
And in thy jewelled hair
Hide thou my face and blind mine aching
eyes!

I hate the strumpet smile
Of Day! No peace hath she.
Draw thou me closer to thy veiléd face!
For thou art womanlike,
A lover and a mother,
And thou canst wrap me close and make
me dream,
As one not cursed with light.
I shall forget my flesh,
This flesh that burns and aches
And fevers into hideous, shameless
deeds!
And in the sweet blind hours
I shall seek out thy lips,
I shall dream sweetly of thy Titan form;
The languid majesty
Of smooth colossal limbs
At ease upon the hemisphere for couch!

And of thy veiléd face
Sweet fancies I shall fashion;
Half lover-like I seek thee, yearning toward thee!
For I am sick of light,
Mine eyes ache, I am weary.

O Woman, Titan-Woman!
Though lesser ones forsake me,
Yet thou wilt share my couch when I am weary.
Thy fingers! Ah, thy fingers!
They touch me! Lift me closer,
Extinguish me amid thy jewelled tresses!

Thou wert the first great mother,
Shalt be the last fair woman:
White breasts of flesh grow cold, soft flesh lips wither:
O First and Ultimate,
O Night, thou Titan-Woman,
Thou wilt not fail me when these fall to dust!

The moon upon thy forehead!
The stars amid thy black locks!
Extinguish me upon thy breast, amid thy tresses!

His yearning to be one with nature is treated as the source of that strength whereby he wins his final mightiest struggle, in "Gaea." Here Nature and the source of spiritual power are identified.

The cycle, "The Stranger at the Gate," is a song of triumph of one who has felt himself as a creator of other life. The reader is struck with the fact that

the poems deal with cosmic things. They are impersonal except as they include the experience of all. Any father may experience the feelings set forth. Countless fathers have done so, no doubt. As a group, the poems show all life absorbed and glorified in reproducing its kind, not a suggestion of sentimentality concerning daisy or buttercup or violet, rather all life from weed to human mother, from flowers to stars, entranced in the cosmic process. Where else in all poetry can this theme be found? It lifts and sweeps the reader on through time and space until he gasps for breath, through material and spiritual realities until he is awed and thrilled. The least detail has the most universal meaning.

There are eleven of these lyrics each deserving of special discussion. "The Weavers" sees all the world at its enthralling task of creating life.

> In the flowing pastures,
> Where the cattle feed,
> Such a hidden love-storm
> Dying into seed—
> Blue grass, slough grass,
> Wild flower, weed!
>
> * * *
>
> Everywhere a mother
> Weaves and sings.

In "The Story" the poet reveals the similarity of feeling on the part of the artist toward his work and his child. Each is a creation—an extension of his own personality, an expression of the universal.

Gotten out of star-glint
Mothered of the Moon;
Nurtured with the rose scent
Wild, elusive throng!
Something of the vine's dream
Crept into a tune;
Something of the wheat-drone
Echoed in a song.

. . . . . .

Star-glint, moon-glow,
Gathered in a mesh!
Spring-hope, white fire
By a kiss beguiled!
Something of the world-joy
Dreaming into flesh!
Bird-song, vine-thrill
Quickened to a child!

"The News" calls upon the breezes to play a symphony of birth using all the forms of Nature to utter its melody over the little stranger that "whimpers at the Gate of Pain," because it is only one form of creation. Here again it is the cosmic note! The birth of a child, any child, is a crowning glory of Nature.

To the writer there is a special appeal in the next lyric, "In the Night." The theme is the dread possibilities for the unborn life, but it is more than that. It is the eternal doubt that the process is good, though the poem ends by touching the cord of faith.

Woven of dust and quiet,
Winged with the dim starlight,
Hideous dream-sounds riot,
Couple and breed and grow;

Big with the dread to-morrow,
Flooding the hollow night
With more than a Thracian sorrow,
More than a Theban woe!

Dupe of a lying pleasure,
Dying slave of desire!
Dreading the swift erasure,
The swoop of the grisly Jinn,
Lo, you have trammelled with dust
A spark of the slumbering Fire,
Given it nerves for lust
And feet for the shards of sin!

Woe to the dreamer waking,
When the Dream shall stalk before him,
With terrible thirsts for slaking,
And hungers mad to be fed!
Oh, he shall sicken of giving,
Cursing the mother that bore him—
Earth, so lean for the living,
Earth, so fat with the dead!

Cease, O sounds that smother!
Peace, mysterious Flouter!
Lo, where the sacred mother
Sleeps in her starry bed,
Dreams of the blessed Comer,
A white awe flung about her,
Wrapped in the hopeful Summer:
The starlight round her head!

"A Hymn Before Birth" is mentioned in another portion of this monograph. In theme it is Pantheism informed by an appreciation of the ever-moving tides of creative force, Pantheism dynamic, in con-

tinued experiment, reaching out to higher and more satisfying expression, urged on and ever on by its own longing.

> You who shall cling to a love that is fearful and pities,
> Titans of flame were your comrades to blight and consume!
> Have you not roared over song-hallowed, sword-stricken cities,
> And fled in the smoke of their doom?
> For, ancient and new, you are flame, you are dust, you are spirit and dew,
> Swirled into flesh, and the winds of the world are your breath!
> The song of a thrush in the hush of the dawn is not younger than you—
> And yet you are older than death!

In "Triumph" the

> victor comes
> To claim the ripened years!

What these ripened years are is revealed in the following poem, "The Child's Heritage." They are the racial experience, the past; for

> The seas are still Homeric seas

and the sky glows

> with Pindar's sun
> The stars of Socrates.

The child inherits all that man's experience has put into human life, the greatest boon of all being,

> The glory of the search for God.

Thus the individual child is identified with humanity in the boundless yearning for new and finer experience.

Last, who ever before conceived of the earth as a cradle devoted wholly to rocking the child?

Sun-flood, moon-gleam
Ebb and flow:
Twinkle-footed star flocks
Come and go:
Eager little Stranger,
Sleep and grow!

Yearning in the moon-lift
Surge the seas;
Southering, the sun-lured
Gray goose flees:
Eager with the same urge,
You and these!

Canopied in splendor—
Red, gold, blue—
With the tender Autumn
Cooing through;
Oh, the mighty cradle
Rocking you!

We turn now to the final division of the volume, the first poem being that which gives title to this section. There can be no more vital message from the poet than the story of his fidelity to his art. There is no bitterness in the "Poet's Town," but no imaginative person, none who has struggled, be it ever so little, for an ideal can fail to feel that these are the lines of one who has been at grips with the

callousness of a world obsessed with materialism. From sixteen to twenty-one Neihardt felt keenly the natural assumption of his associates, who could not be expected to share his vision, that he was wasting his life in fatuous endeavor; and he realized that, unless he succeeded as a poet, he would indeed be no more than the weakling of the village, doomed to endure the "yellow smiles" and sly ridicule of those who could not see "the light that never was on land or sea." He fought bitterly, ruthlessly at times, he says. Then came a little gleam of success. Six years later, at the age of twenty-seven, his name was in Who's Who in America, at that time one of thirteen so listed who were born since 1880. Eleven years spanned the time from bitter rebellion to the serene philosophy that comes with the satisfaction of successful workmanship. "The Poet's Town" is the result.

The theme is the struggle of the artist to create new values in a world that strives to kill its exceptions as soon as they appear. There is first the glory of the cosmos, then the mystic meaning of

> The sowers planting vision,
> The reapers gleaning awe.

It is its law that gives the cosmos beauty. Again, the poet is heir to all the ages. The sordid life of the town is glorified:

> Often the lonesome boy
> Saw in the farmers' wagons
> The chariots hurled at Troy

Absorbed in his dream he grows away from his companions. Then pressure is placed upon him, but all through youth and manhood he is unable to accept the valuations of those about him. He sees so much more than do others. He is one set apart. Fain would he be like the rest, but he is obsessed with Beauty. She is his Mistress, his Conqueror, his Life and his Death. But the poet is nothing. Beauty is all, and that shall last through unnumbered ages. An angel has been entertained unawares and he has gone unto his own, leaving a mystic glory over the spot of his birth, because he created Beauty anew, again revealed God to Man.

> Then what of the lonesome dreamer
> With the lean blue flame in his breast?
> And who was your clown for a day, O
> Town,
> The strange, unbidden guest?
>
> Mid glad green miles of tillage
> And fields where cattle graze,
> A prosy little village,
> You drowse away the days.
>
> And yet—a wakeful glory
> Clings round you as you doze;
> One living, lyric story
> Makes music of your prose!

The poem grips the reader as much by its calm at the heart of the storm as by its revelation of struggle. There is no contempt for those who do not understand. Nor is there a faint suggestion that the poet shall arrogate anything to himself. He

merely feels the beauty and cries unto the world: "See! oh see!" Nor is there the trace of an intimation that he, Neihardt, has won an immortality of fame. The poem is true of all who create new values and to a degree of all who attempt it.

In this volume is some direct discussion of society. "And the Little Wind—" is a case of sly humor in which the "justifiable falsehood" about the divine order of the social high-and-low is demolished with perfect reserve and utter *sang-froid.* "The Song of the Turbine Wheel" should be published on the flyleaf of Veblen's "Theory of a Leisure Class." "Money" is a splendid document for all who would expose the fallacy of "profits." "The Red Wind Comes" is a magnificent indictment of a selfish and stupid industrial order, with a note of confidence in the coming change. "Katharsis" utters grim joy over the fact that at last purification must come, though it be after all the wealth piled up by a thousand years of unrequited toil shall have been sunk, and every drop of blood wrung from wage slavery shall have been repaid by another shed upon the battle field.

No one less than Neihardt desires to write for a "select" few, in the usual sense of the word. He would write for all who need his message. His readers are found in all walks of life. If there is one note more comforting, more inspiriting to the race than all others, it is that of courage. In a recent anthology of poems of courage more were from Neihardt than from any other poet.

His spirited lines beginning

Let me live out my years in heat of blood

have had wide circulation. A miner once wrote from the Yukon stating that, when he had felt like giving up, that poem had often roused him to renewed effort.

"Battle Cry" is also current, especially among strong men who fight against odds. The court room in Los Angeles was hushed and thrilled when at the close of his remarkable speech in his own defense Clarence Darrow thundered these lines to a breathless jury and audience. One who was present declares how deep was the impression, and remarks that this peroration from the lines of the young poet had much to do with the acquittal of the defendant. Samuel Gompers likewise recently closed an address to the American Federation of Labor in convention at Minneapolis by declaiming "Battle Cry." Yet more notable, the poem has been translated into the French and was used in a speech shortly before his assassination by Jaurés, the great French socialist, editor of *La Humanité.*

It will be recalled that in the earlier pages of this monograph attention was directed to the quality of courage demanded by the complex world of today. The modern hero is not surrounded and armored by the gods. He fights alone with no certainty of victory. "Fighting the fight is all." The message of courage is old but ever new, for each generation meets and makes a new world.

More than half beaten, but fearless,
Facing the storm and the night;
Breathless and reeling, but tearless,
Here in the lull of the fight,
I who bow not but before Thee,
God of the fighting Clan,
Lifting my fists I implore Thee,
Give me the heart of a Man!

What though I live with the winners
Or perish with those who fall?
Only the cowards are sinners,
Fighting the fight is all.
Strong is my Foe—he advances!
Snapt is my blade, O Lord!
See the proud banners and lances!
Oh spare me this stub of a sword!

Give me no pity, nor spare me;
Calm not the wrath of my Foe.
See where he beckons to dare me!
Bleeding, half beaten—I go.
Not for the glory of winning,
Not for the fear of the night;
Shunning the battle is sinning—
Oh spare me the heart to fight!

Red is the mist about me;
Deep is the wound in my side;
"Coward" thou criest to flout me?
O terrible Foe, thou hast lied!
Here with my battle before me,
God of the fighting clan,
Grant that the woman who bore me
Suffered to suckle a man!

Another lyric, "The Fool's Mother," that has had much vogue and been so often reprinted that

many times the author's name is not attached to it, was not written for publication. It is intensely personal as well as widely human. It is the very image of the love and fear of his own mother concerning her son during the early years when he seemed to trample upon all people and all values that arrayed themselves against him and his vision. He laid the manuscript away and several years later, when pushed for lyrics, sent it to McClure's Magazine, which published it.

When I—the fool—am dead,
There will be one to stand above my head,
Her wan lips yearning for my quiet lips
That stung her soul so oft with bitter cries.
And I shall feel forgiving finger-tips
And I shall hear her saying with her sighs:
"This fool I mothered sucked a bitter breast;
His life was fever and his soul was fire:
O burning fool, O restless fool at rest,
None other knew how high you could aspire,
None other knew how deep your soul could sink!"
And when these words above the fool are said,
The others ranged about the room shall think:
"The fool is dead".

Religion seeks to evade creeds and yet is drawn to make them. The poet's creed at which he arrived

after much experience and striving is embodied in "Nemesis." We live in a world of cause and effect—a universe governed by Law—a self-evolving universe, carrying the seeds of its own development and destruction. The author often speaks of his belief in a "mechanical principle of morals." This is the expression of his matured judgment on life. Is it not a true interpretation? Ignorance, as well as willfulness, is sin. Sentimentalism brings in its train loss and failure. The weakly good, the stubborn, the prejudiced—all who refuse to face the processes of life, shall surely suffer in the remorseless grip of Nemesis—unalterable Law. Is there any truth written more clearly than this—that those alone shall survive who think in terms of cause and effect?

For ever the wage of sorrow
Paid for the lawless deed;
Never the gray to-morrow
Paused for a pious price;
Never by prayer and psalter
Perished the guilty seed;
Vain was the wail at the altar,
The smoke of the sacrifice.

I am one in the fall of the pebble,
The call of the sea to the stream,
The wrath of the starving rebel,
The plunge of the vernal thaw:
The yearning of things to be level,
The stir of the deed in the dream;
I am these—I am angel and devil—
I am Law!

But the spirit of religion is not inconsistent with a world of cause and effect. Prayer, the highest expression of religious feeling, is both cause and effect. It is perhaps necessary in some form to the highest art. At any rate we find much of it in poetry and none has expressed the religious aspirations in more satisfying verse than is found in "The Quest."

The first prayer is entitled "Let Me Live Out My Years." No fear of death haunts these lines, rather the thrill of the great adventure. In comparison, the spirit of resignation, usually thought of as peculiarly Christian, is far less worthy. The supreme cry is in the last two lines, to feel the melody of the Master and to give forth its mighty notes.

"The Prayer of an Alien Soul" is the mood of yearning melancholy. He "craves the boon of dying into life." This feeling belongs to adolescence. It is a of part with Keats' Sonnet, "When I have fears that I shall cease to be," though it states an opposite desire. Keats would remain that he may complete his work, while at this moment Neihardt would go that he may fulfill his destiny, for with him fulfillment lies yonder.

> I hear the far cry of my destiny
> Whose meaning sings beyond the furthest sun.
> I faint in these red chains, and I would 'rise and run,
> O Center of the Scheme,
> Star-Flinger, Beauty-Builder, Shaping Dream!

It is fitting that the boy who so loved the earth shall in manhood utter one prayer to the Earth-spirit, "Gaea, Mother Gaea." What young man of sensitive nature but has felt at the near approach of marriage, an overwhelming sense of unfitness? One who did not would scarcely be human. Happy he whose God, whether that be the Earth or a star or Jehovah, at this hour seems near and intimate! No far-off abstract deity suffices. The "blood-cry for succor" must have adequate response in the soothing, all-embracing voice that one has known in every hour from childhood.

> Suckler of virile fighting things thou art!
> Breathe in me something of the tireless sea;
> The urge of mighty rivers breathe in me!
> Cloak me with purple like thy haughty peaks;
> Oh arm me as a wind-flung cloud that wreaks
> Hell-furies down the midnight battle-murk!
> Fit me to do this utmost warrior's work—
> To face myself and conquer!
>
> * * *
>
> Oh, all the mad spring revelling is gone,
> And now—the wise sweet summer! Let me be
> Deep-rooted in thy goodness as a tree,
> Strong in the storms with skyward blossomings!
> Teach me the virile trust of growing things,
> The wisdom of slow fruiting in the sun!

—Lift me up!
Fill all my soul with kindness as a cup
With cool and bubbling waters! Mother dear,
Gaea, great Gaea, 'tis thy son—Oh hear!

"The Ghostly Brother" is a cry to let the cup pass. It quivers with the pains of one bound to a mission. The cost of the struggle to create beats in every line. To create Beauty is the highest value the soul conceives. To do so is to suffer, to cry aloud, to be bound to the wheel. The experience is of the essence of religion, it is the spirit of Loyola and Saint Francis. That his Art should be the ghostly brother of whose presence he has been conscious since childhood clothes the whole experience with a beauty in which art and religion are united. The entire poem breathes with the feeling more than belief, that the cosmos holds communion with the man through a radiant personality. To be united with this spirit brother is to be an artist and more than an artist, an artist not only in forms of expression but in life. It is to have a reach that exceeds his grasp. This surely is religion.

Brother, Brother, follow hence!
Ours the wild, unflagging speed!
Through the outer walls or sense,
Follow, follow where I lead!
Love and hate and grief and fear—
'Tis the geocentric dream!
Only shadows linger here,
Cast by the eternal Gleam!

Follow, follow, follow fast!—
Somewhere out of Time and Place,
You shall lift the veil at last,
You shall look upon my face:
Look upon my face and die,
Solver of the Mystery!
I am you and you are I—
Brother, Brother, follow me!

"The Quest" has become more assured as we approach the close of the volume. The poet has found himself. He may not know the end of his journey, nay, he knows that it has no end, but he knows its direction. He is an "Echo from a Wonder-Horn." He is a fountain

Dancing, mad with cosmic tune,
Laughing under stars and moon.
Back to the ocean soon!

He is a sailor outward bound,

Into the blue or into the black,
Onward, outward, never back!
Something mighty and weird and dim
Calls me under the ocean rim.

He is the searcher for the secret and if he "follow, follow fast,"

Somewhere out of Time and Place

he shall see.

At times he feels sure of personal existence after death. He shall meet his "ghostly brother." Again he is lured by the feeling that he shall become

Part of the cosmic weird economy.

But whether he is to be conscious or unconscious he feels the thrill of "The Quest."

Kin to all the songs that are,
Of a mighty singing born,
Sun and I and Sea and Star,
Echoes from a Wonder-Horn.

* * *

And Oh while the slow gloom chained
the Deed,
I wrought my vision of silvery speed!
And out of the dread hush round about,
I fashioned a gladsome victor-shout!
Sister of Wave and Cloud am I,
And the world grows green as I pass by—
Back to the Sea and Sky!

* * *

Sweep up the bitter ashes from the
hearth!
Fling back the dust I borrowed from the
Earth
Unto the chemic broil of Death and
Birth—
The vast Alembic of the cryptic Scheme,
Warm with the Master-Dream!

Now the reader is prepared for the last note. In the work of the thinker and the artist, such as Neihardt, this final song will of necessity be a suggestion of the meaning of the entire volume, a definition of "The Quest." What is it? The feeling for the infinite, union with all the past, with all the future, a thrilling sense of the onward movement of all life. How shall he define it, this feeling old as the race; yet new in every generation; fresh every

morning? Surely it is the search to understand, the reverence for Truth. It is prayer.

Oh seek me not within a tomb;
Thou shalt not find me in the clay!
I pierce a little wall of gloom
To mingle with the Day!

I brothered with the things that pass,
Poor giddy Joy and puckered Grief;
I go to brother with the Grass
And with the sunning Leaf.

Not Death can sheathe me in a shroud;
A joy-sword whetted keen with pain,
I join the armies of the Cloud,
The Lightning and the Rain.

Oh subtle in the sap a-thrill,
Athletic in the glad uplift,
A portion of the Cosmic Will,
I pierce the planet-drift.

My God and I shall interknit
As rain and Ocean, breath and Air;
And Oh, the luring thought of it
Is prayer!

CHAPTER III

NEIHARDT has published two dramas, "The Death of Agrippina," in Poetry, May 1913, and "Eight Hundred Rubles," one act, in the Forum, March 1915.

When these appear in book form, it will be as companion pieces, under the title "Two Mothers." They are based on two permanent factors of social life—food (economic determinism) and sex in its form of mother love. In each case the mother is infatuated with her son and destroys her son and thus herself through insane devotion. They represent the extremes of economic condition—much and little, each without spiritual control.

The author's conception of Agrippina is not that of a monster, but rather a strange and abnormal mother, as truly in love with Nero as was ever woman with man. Since love and hate are strangely kin, since it is possible to love and hate the same person at nearly the same moment, the drama reveals lurid flashes in which Agrippina shows the potentialities of hate toward her son, the hate that might have led the Roman armies to the overthrow of their Emperor.

But the play is concerned with the events of a few hours in which the love of her son is dominant, hours that glow with triumph, pass to dread and close in

despair and death. No, not quite despair; for in the end she is upheld by the wondrous consciousness that she is still the mother of Caesar.

As for Nero, the conception is that he is a madman, drunk with power, enslaved with lust, with the fantastic vanity of a clown.

The incidents are the ball that accompanies the reconciliation that is to cover the plot to drown Agrippina, the discovery that she has escaped, the waiting of Agrippina for Nero, ending with the arrival of the assassins and her murder. In the first act, are shown the revelers, some of whom perceive the plot; Agrippina played upon by her son, wooing him like a maiden, blinded, exalted, tremulous with passion; Nero himself carried away by the part of lover even while leading Agrippina to death; Poppaea casting baleful gleams as she broods,

> Certain of her goal,
> Her veil a sea-fog clutching at the moon,
> A portent to wise sailors!

Much skill is apparent in the use of Poppaea's veil as through the confused thoughts of Nero the moon has "Poppaea's dizzy face" and he cries out to "veil the huzzy." Only the careful reader perceives the associations of the moon with the face of the mistress of Nero.

The character of Nero is nowhere shown more clearly than in the soliloquy that follows the departure of his mother on the doomed ship.

> *Nero.* Dimmer—dimmer—dimmer—
> A shadow melting in a moony shimmer

Down the bleak seaways dwindling to
that shore
Where no heaved anchor drips forever-
more,
Nor winds breathe music in the homing
sail:
But over sunless hill and fruitless vale,
Gaunt spectres drag the age-long dis-
content
And ponder what this brief, bright mo-
ment meant—
The loving—and the dreaming—and the
laughter.
Ah, ships that vanish take what never
after
Returning ships may carry.

But as with all who are mad with egotism, it is of himself that Nero thinks, not of his mother cruelly murdered. His monstrous crime interests him intensely in his own emotions:

Dawn shall flare,
Make bloom the terraced gardens of the
air
For all the world but Lucius. He shall
see
The haunted hollow of Infinity
Gray in the twilight of a heart's eclipse.
With our own wishes woven into whips
The jealous gods chastise us!—I'm
alone!
About the transient brilliance of my
throne
The giddy moths flit briefly in the glow:
But when at last that light shall flicker
low,

A taper guttering in a gust of doom,
What hand shall grope for Nero's in the gloom,
What fond eyes shed the fellows of his tears?

But he will flee to art for his consolation. The greatest crime shall give birth to the greatest poem: "I'll write an ode!" Vain sophistry! The abnormal never creates the universal, the therefore permanent.

In the second act we are with Nero while he awaits the news of the death of his mother and receives instead her message that she has been saved. It is characteristic of the unstable to claim agency for all his acts that issue in approved ends and to deny it (even subjectively) in those that end in disaster.

Nero awakes from a nightmare overwhelmed with remorse. He sees the ghost of his mother; the page boy who brings him wine seems to be the murdered Britannicus. He demands light.

By the bronze beard I swear there shall be lights
Enough hereafter, though I purge the nights
With conflagrating cities.

In order to relieve his soul of responsibility he thinks

'Twas not my deed! I did not wish it so!
Some demon, aping Caesar, gave the word

While Lucius Aenobarbus' eyes were
blurred
With too much beauty.

Ah! That is the answer! Poppaea! He will kill her! Read the lines of the raving emperor poet. How strikingly faithful to the psychology of megalomania are their huge, grotesque images!

Would that the haughty blood these
hands will shed
Might warm my mother! that the
breath I crush—
So—(*clutching air*) from that throat of
sorceries, might rush
Into the breast that loved and nurtured
me!
The heart of Nero shivers in the sea,
And Rome is lorn of pity!
Could the world
And all her crawling spawn this night
be hurled
Into one woman's form, with eyes to
shed
Rivers of scalding woe, her towering
head
Jeweled with realms aflare, with locks
of smoke,
Huge nerves to suffer, and a neck to
choke—
That woman were Poppaea! I would
rear
About the timeless sea, my mother's
bier,
A sky-roofed desolation groined with
awe,

Where, nightly drifting in the stream of law,
The vestal stars should tend their fires, and weep
To hear upon the melancholy deep
That shipless wind, her ghost, amid the hush!
Alas! I have but one white throat to crush
With these world-hungry fingers!

None the less the reader knows that the mere presence of Poppaea will instantly drive away these monstrous imaginings to the spectral land whence they came and drive Nero on to complete the design against his mother's life.

Poppaea. (*Languidly*) My Nero longed for me?
(*Nero with his free hand brushes his eyes in perplexity.*)
Nero. I—can not—tell—
What—'twas—I—wished—I wished—
Poppaea. (*Haughtily*) Ah, very well.
(*She walks slowly on across the stage. Nero stares blankly after her. The sword drops from his hand. As Poppaea disappears, he rouses suddenly as from a stupor.*)
Nero. Ho! Guards!
(*Three soldiers enter. Nero points to Agerinus.*)
There—seize that wretch who came to kill
Imperial Caesar!

(*Agerinus is seized. Nero turns to Anicetus.*)
Hasten! Do your will!
(*Nero turns, and with an eager expression on his face, goes doddering after Poppaea.*)

Now, as the tragedy darkens to its close, we see Agrippina even more clearly in her fundamental character, that of *Mother*. Conscious in her inmost being that he has plotted her murder, she yet deceives herself into expecting Nero's coming to greet her. Once reality flashes through and we glimpse the warrior woman able to lead an army of vengeance. But instantly there surges back the mother who had schemed and murdered for the advancement of her son, suffered shame at his hands and now, about to die at his command, is yet glorified in her motherhood. Was ever finer death song?

Oh, I have triumphed and am ripe to die!
About my going shall the trumpets cry
Forever and forever!
I can thread
The twilit under-regions of the dead
A radiant shadow with a heart that sings!
Before the myriad mothers of great kings
I shall lift up each livid spirit hand
Spotted with blood—and they shall understand
How small the price was!

"Eight Hundred Rubles" is an equally compelling attack upon the economic system that does not per-

mit the development of spiritual values. The love of a peasant mother for the son lost at sea becomes so perverted that she despises her daughter and her husband. Destitution added to loss hardens her to the point of murdering, for a small sum of money, a wandering youth who is asleep at the twilight in the garden. The daughter tries to restrain her saying "What if 'twere Ivan!" Over that point the whole philosophy of the poem comes out. All lovers are my lover, says the girl; all sons our son. No! replies the mother. Sons are nothing now that Ivan is dead. The girl is sent out of the house on a pretended errand; the weak father yields, the murder is committed, and lo—the stranger is Ivan who was not drowned at sea after all. When you care for a youth you care for your own. When you murder any son you murder your own son. Such is the principle that identifies the members of the race as one, and the violation of which has filled life with woe.

The spiritual attitude is that of the girl:

> The heart's an open inn,
> And from the four winds fare
> Vagrants blind with care
> Waifs that limp with sin;
> Ghosts of what has been
> Wraiths of what may be:
> But one shall bring the sacred gift—
> And which is he?
> And with their wounds of care
> And with their scars of sin.
> All these shall enter in
> To find a welcome there;

And he who gives with prayer
Shall be the richer host:
For surely unto him shall come
The Holy Ghost.

* * *

Perhaps he always comes so—like a guest
Unbidden, with an ache of dragging feet;
Not king-like but a traveller seeking rest
And just a bite to eat.
Yet surely 'tis the purpose of God's plan
That the great love fail not to keep its tryst:
One feeds one's lover in a hungry man,
And love is Christ.
What if this dream should not endure the day
But vanish as the charmed night frays and fades
And he should take his pack and be away
Into a world of other waiting maids?
Still 'twas my Prince who hungered and was fed
For surely in the land where he may be
Some other dreaming girl has given my bread
To him who seeks for me.

The extreme selfish, personal view of love is uttered by the mother:

Had they not taken my son, I should not need

Eight hundred rubles now! The world's
made wrong,
And I'll not live to vex it very long.
Who work should take their wages where
they can.
It should have been my boy come back
a man,
With this same goodly hoard to bring us
cheer.
Now let some other mother peer and
peer
At her own window through a blurring
pane,
And see the world go out in salty rain,
And start at every gust that shakes the
door!
What does a green girl know? You
never bore
A son that you should prate of wrong
and right!
I tell you, I have wakened in the night,
Feeling his milk-teeth sharp upon my
breast,
And for one aching moment I was blest,
Until I minded that 'twas years ago
These flattened paps went milkless—and
I know!

And again she scorns all values but the lowest:

Kill a hog for lard,
A thief for gold—one reason and one
knife!
I tell you, gold is costlier than life!
What price shall we have brought when
we are gone?
When Ivan died, the heartless world
went on

Breeding more sons that men might still
be cheap.

* * *

Life costly?—Cheap as mud!

After the discovery of the identity of the slain youth, while the mother stands staring, her hands dripping with blood as the father shrieks

What have you done?

with fine dramatic skill the song of universal love comes floating into the room from the lips of the girl who, unconscious of the tragedy, thus sings the world-old story:

O weary heart and sore,
O yearning eyes that blur,
A hand that drips with myrrh
Is knocking at the door!
The waiting time is o'er,
Be glad, look up and see
How splendid is a dream come true—
'Tis he! 'tis he!

The two dramas ought to live as the prophetic indictment of a world gone mad with lust for wealth and for power, a world that produces cruelty and murder as inevitably as the law of gravitation draws all things to their level, as a statement of the spiritual nature of value, of the unity of the human race, and they ought to help in the coming of a better day.

CHAPTER IV

ONE

IF this chapter were to be given a title, it would be called The First Democratic Epic. At the time of this writing, Neihardt is working on the third poem of his epic cycle of five which, when completed, will cover the development of the great Trans-Missouri country from the time of Lewis and Clark to the end of the Sioux Wars. "The Song of Hugh Glass" appeared in 1915; "The Song of Three Friends," in 1919.

The determination to attempt the writing of the epic cycle was arrived at gradually and was a natural outgrowth of the experience of years. Since the beginning of his interest in the West he has studied, in a most painstaking manner, its entire history. Little known sources, original manuscripts and letters, all have been collected and pondered much. Indeed, few men know more of this subject than Neihardt. To this knowledge he adds an unique experience with the Indians. Charles Godfrey Leland says that there are certain white men who have a strange and mysterious gift of getting on with the Indians. Neihardt is such an one. On one occasion an Omaha chief said of him: "I like that young man; he eats with us; he smokes with us; he does not make fun of us as many white

men do." Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, a highly educated Omaha woman, daughter of Iron Eye, last head chief of the Omahas, said concerning Neihardt's Indian stories, that everything a white person from Cooper to Remington had written about the Indians angered her except "The Lonesome Trail." She averred that Neihardt alone had discovered the real Indian, and expressed amazement that any white man could so get into the consciousness of the Indians as to make their general attitude and even their idioms comprehensible to the white race.

An illustration of the aptitude of the poet for becoming *en rapport* with this primitive people is found in the following incident. In the spring of 1918, while visiting the Crow Agency, Neihardt met Curley, the friendly Crow scout, who alone escaped from the Custer massacre on the Little Big Horn. Through an interpreter the two discussed, for several hours, incidents of the battle. Thinking the interview ended, Neihardt left Curley and went to the station. Shortly after, Curley and the interpreter sought him out for a second interview, and the interpreter spoke as follows: "Curley, he say he like you. He want to be your brother and he want you to be his brother, and he say he want to give you his ring, so when he look at it you think of him." Neihardt was delighted and, having a silver ring that he had gotten from the Pueblos in New Mexico, replied: "I will take Curley's ring and give him this so that when I look at it he will think of

me too." So with the interpreter as witness they exchanged rings and became "brother friends." After years of such association in which the Omahas learned to trust the poet, and gave him a name, Tae-Nugà-Zhinga, Little-Bull-Buffalo; in which the Crow scout sought from him the nearest relation known to primitive men, it is not strange that Neihardt is able to interpret the spirit of this vanishing people.

Lastly, for many years Neihardt has cultivated the acquaintance of men who shared in the great adventure of the conquest of the west. When going up the Missouri in 1908, he sailed with Captain Marsh, the first man to receive, from Curley, the news of the fate of Custer, and for days Neihardt questioned the captain concerning the event. He has talked by the hour with trappers, hunters, river men, traders; he has written to and has many letters from the remnant of those who, when they "had scarce attained the height of men" went forth because

> —that old sireny of unknown things
> Bewitched them and they could not
> linger more.

When in 1908, Neihardt took the journey referred to above, going up the Missouri River to the head of navigation at Fort Benton and making the long trip down the stream, he still thought of early western history as material for prose, and many of his short stories make use of this material. After the trip, as has been stated, he wrote "The River

and I" with its remarkable opening chapter entitled "The River of an Unwritten Epic." How deeply the material thus brought to hand had laid hold upon the poet is revealed in such sentences as these: "But the Missouri is more than a sentiment—even more than an epic. It is the symbol of my own soul, which, is, I surmise, not unlike other souls. In it I see flung before me all the stern world-old struggle become materialized. Here is the concrete representation of the earnest desire, the momentarily frustrate purpose, the beating at the bars, the breathless fighting of the half-whipped but never-to-be-conquered spirit, the sobbing of the wind-broken runner, the anger, the madness, the laughter. And, in it all, the unwearying urge of a purpose, the unswerving belief in the peace of a far-away ocean. * * * Not the deeds, but Homer and Æschylus were great. * * * We have the facts—but we have not Homer." Surely such expressions show that already he was reaching toward the determination to attempt the task of composing the American epic.

After a considerable time, he came to this vision of the work: Any representative human experience expressed in its relations has beauty. Adequate expression reveals these relationships. On this principle all the seeming hard facts of the struggle for the conquest of the West might be realized as poetry. This principle of adequacy was to form the basic pattern of the work. The greatness of the epic would then depend on the greatness of the mood created by the whole.

This principle also revealed the main outline for a technique of composition. There must be a level below which no line should fall, but above which the poem might rise to any height. This level should differ in style from common speech only in being rhythmic and compact. It should depend for its power only on the principles of economy and adequacy. A card game, the building of a fort, could thus furnish the materials of poetry. The succession of short flights would have the effect of so many lyrics, the lower level would bind them together and the whole would give the epic mood. This thought furnishes a correction line for criticism of Poe. While there is some truth in Poe's conception that an epic is a succession of lyrics, yet the larger truth is that there is, in the epic, a mood infinitely greater than that of any of its parts. A great poem, whether lyric, drama or epic, is great, not because of any incidental thing. The greatness lies in the whole. There must be a scheme into which every division of the work, every rhyme, every line, every syllable fits with exactness, and to the realization of which each portion contributes. Neihardt once remarked that this is the distinctive quality of architecture as distinguished from ornament. The design of the temple as a whole is the supreme matter, and that principle gives definite importance to each detail.

Is the material of these poems fitted for the purposes of epic composition? First, there is the right social situation, a movement of populations, a new

civilization displacing an older one, or at least the group with better technique for fighting crushing the more backward people. Neihardt conceives this as the last lap of the movement of Aryan peoples out of Mesopotamia, across the Hellespont, across Europe and America to the Pacific slope; and it is to be noted that each phase of this movement has produced its epic.

Out of this situation the poet has chosen the epic figures, the individuals who epitomize the high mood of courage that characterizes all epics. Homer's two poems, constituting one epic, are concerned with two figures, Achilles and Odysseus. It is a tale of single combats, hero against hero, god against god,—all else is background. So in Neihardt's two poems the exploits of single individuals reveal the whole.

Again, the background of the poems, the thing subsumed throughout, is that the conquest of the wilderness is that which gives meaning to the poems. "Make way for the future!" cries the Great Process, and Glass and Jamie, Fink and Carpenter and Talbeau, Jedediah Smith, Ashley, Forsyth, Crook and Custer rise and pass. In this they are like Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon and Siegfried. The hero flings his challenge to fate and is snuffed. In this larger view the individual is nothing. It is the evolution of higher forms of which he is the unconscious instrument that gives the epic meaning. Helen and Trojan treachery are mere excuses for the Iliad, Achilles and Agamemnon are its form of expression, while the

mood of courage produced by the sweep of Europe to the control of the Hellespont and the Black Sea is its soul. In the words of Joseph Conrad all these adventurers of all ages "to us, their less tried successors, appear magnified, not as agents of trade, but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future."

Perhaps, too, the fullness of time for the American epic has at length come. Macaulay, who himself loved poetry and wrote some spirited ballads, was so foolish as to say that writers and readers of poetry could arise only in the childhood of a people. The truth seems to be nearly or quite the opposite. Apparently, it is only those who later, looking backward longingly upon its towering figures, can appreciate the glory thereof and, in seeking to recreate the situation that has gone, write poetry and read it. The Iliad was the creation of a more settled and disillusioned age some five hundred years after the events. Our age of disillusionment is here and we are looking backward for that racial possession of high daring that furnishes the mood of the epic. Present events seem sordid, and so the poet comes to grope in the mists of bygone days for our heroes and sets their glory to music. "Mnemosyne is the mother of the muses."

Again, the setting is favorable for the epic. The Odyssey gives us the glory of the sea. These later poems reveal the glory of the prairies—a thing "for

which the speech of England has no name." "The Song of Hugh Glass" is the first bit of literature that ever showed the great plains in their elemental grandeur. Neihardt paints a thousand shades of light on the waste, changing every hour from dawn to midnight, and again from midnight back to dawn. He reveals prairies in the killing heat of an August afternoon; in the intense and blinding cold of the blizzard, in the gathering storm, at its crisis, and when the storm has passed; when the moon is new, is full, is old, and when the stars alone look down; in every season, in every imaginable light and shade, and the reader lays down his volume with an unforgettable, deep-carved impression of the majesty of the prairies.

Then, too, he has the right sort of men for our epic; for we believe at least that in this day the common man has come to his own. The hour of democracy has struck and here is the first democratic epic. In the days of Homer only demi-gods and kings with women of more than earthly beauty could figure in an epic. These, with their windy speeches and the constant interference by the gods whereby both heroes and cowards become poor puppets jerked by wires too visible, are a bit wearisome to the sophisticated reader. Hence we drop Homer for O. Henry. But Neihardt, knowing the common man, knows also that he has heroic possibilities. One day the poet said to me, "Doubtless there are a dozen men in Wayne who, with training, could accomplish the feat of endurance that

has made Glass famous." Courage and strength are a race inheritance. The people of the slums are potentially the equals of all. Humanity is divine or there is no divinity. Thus Neihardt has tapped new reserves of poetic material; material, indeed, especially fitted for our day.

Again the matter-of-factness with which the poems are written appeals to the present day reader. While wonderful things happen and there are hints concerning ghosts, yet all rests upon a psychology that appeals to the people of the twentieth century. It matters not whether Carpenter's spirit be real or merely the embodied love of Talbeau and the gnawing conscience of Fink; the ghost is real to the reader. But to a twentieth century American who reads the Iliad there is ever just below the surface, a suggestion of the unreality of Zeus, Hera, Thetis, and all the rest, and only a due sense of solemnity can sometimes keep back a chuckle. A democratic age wants a democratic hero, and an age steeped in material science wants its deities to maintain a moderate remoteness. But that does not mean that we cannot be moved when relations of cause and effect relentlessly write Fate large upon the page.

Let us look more closely at this last point. Before beginning the writing of the Crawl in "Hugh Glass", Neihardt thought it worth while to find out just how Hugh must have made his journey. He learned all about the topography of the region; how the streams erode; what shrubs, grasses and fruits grow

there. When he came to the place where Hugh strikes fire, he did not assume that such rocks would be found in that spot. He had never been in just that place, though he knew vast scopes of country contiguous thereto. He knew that the Missouri River marks the westward edge of the glacial drift and so could not be sure that such stones were to be found just where Hugh was at the time in question. So he consulted the geologist of South Dakota and secured scientific information. How far can a keelboat travel in a day under given conditions? How far can a starving, wounded hunter crawl in a given time? How long would it take a canoe crew to go up the Missouri from its junction with the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Musselshell, and what would be its progress each day under given conditions? To Neihardt it seemed worth while to know such things and to tell his readers. The use of the changes of the moon to indicate the rate of travel, as found in both "Hugh Glass" and "Three Friends," gets back to primitive life with a completeness that is fairly startling. In most poetry the moon is merely an adjunct of affairs of the heart. Again, is a dead buffalo or a stewed dog a theme for poetry? Yes, for in each case they were a means of life. Every detail in the accounts of how the starving hunter found the buffalo surrounded by wolves and covered by birds of prey, winning his way to a chunk of raw meat, or how he slew and cooked the dog, throbs with meaning. The discovery of a trader's knife in the ashes of a camp fire repre-

sents all that tools have meant for man. I believe I prefer both its finding and its purpose to those of Excalibur. They are closer to universal reality.

We begin now the discussion of "Hugh Glass", the story which is second in point of sequence in the series, but first in time of publication.

The tale is founded upon an experience of a notable hunter who went with General Ashley and his hundred men up the Missouri in 1823. During the summer this band had a battle with the Rickaree Indians in which Glass, a man of sixty years or more, was wounded in saving the life of his friend Jamie, a boy of perhaps eighteen, for many of the men of these bands were mere boys, "no older for their beards." Jamie has the boy's admiration for Glass, growing out of the fact that the latter has had many adventures and has a happy way of telling them. The rescue of Jamie deepens the friendship of each.

Shortly after the battle with the Ree, eighty of the band of two hundred separate from their companions and under Major Henry start up the Grand River to the mouth of the Big Horn, there to spend the winter and trade with the Indians. Of this number are Hugh and Jamie, their companionship growing ever more intimate.

Near the forks of the Grand, in what is now the northern part of South Dakota, the party runs out of meat and Hugh is told off by the Major to kill some of the wild game that is abundant in the region. Though Jamie begs to accompany him,

Hugh prefers to go alone. But on the evening of the second day of Hugh's absence, Jamie eludes the rest of the men and goes to find Hugh and enjoy the adventure with him.

He finds Hugh near the forks of the Grand, apparently dead by reason of a surprise attack by a grizzly bear. Jamie stays by Hugh, who remains unconscious, until the arrival of the rest of the men the following morning.

Hugh's condition is such that he cannot be moved and he is apparently bound to die soon. Major Henry calls for volunteers to stay with the wounded man until he dies or recovers sufficiently to continue the journey. Jamie volunteers and Jules Le Bon, the real villain of the story, consents, for pay, to remain with Jamie.

From the beginning Jules plans to desert Hugh as soon as possible. With consummate skill he works upon Jamie's fears until he, too, is willing to desert his friend, who really seems as good as dead. In departing, Le Bon steals Hugh's rifle, blanket and knife, thus making sure that the treachery will never be revealed, for if Glass recovers he is certain to starve to death. Thus the cowardly murder is conceived and executed, except for a slight miscarriage.

At length Hugh emerges from his trance, discovers the betrayal, conceives of Jamie as the betrayer, and, nourished by berries, breadroot, etc., *crawls* to the Moreau, the Cheyenne, the Missouri, and floats down to Fort Kiowa. Thence he goes north

to Fort Henry "white hot to kill," but Jamie, smitten by conscience, has started south and they have missed each other. Hugh then goes south to Fort Atkinson and again misses Jamie, who has heard of the recovery of his friend and is seeking him. Starting north, Hugh hears of Jamie's search and comes at length to realize how great is the boy's suffering.

But somewhere near the mouth of the Milk River Hugh loses track of Jamie, and when he finds him far to the north, almost to the Canada line, in a village of the Piegan Indians, the boy is blind from the explosion of a rifle and sick almost to death with remorse. Of course forgiveness and reconciliation follow.

In every great epic Fate is the chief actor and it is the wild instincts of men and women that are Nemesis. "Temperament is destiny." The disaster of Troy is wrought by a lovesick coward. The fateful quarrel between the King of Men and swift footed Achilles is over a maiden. When men see red the jealous gods laugh with "wild sardonic laughter."

The story of Hugh Glass and Jamie is a love story. The mutual attraction is undoubtedly sex-love, here innocent of wrong. This is a not uncommon phenomenon.

When the Ganymedes in Jamie is foremost he is "a fancy-ridden child at play," a fickle mistress whom Hugh loves as a strong, faithful lover might.

Nor could these know what mocking
ghost of Spring
Stirred Hugh's gray world with dreams
of blossoming
That wooed no seed to swell or bird to
sing.

In the struggle with conditions that called, not for a moment's flare of courage but for the faithful endurance of suffering in long continued danger, Jamie's treachery was inevitable and Hugh's jealous wrath certain to burn like a "still white hell." Here is Fate, grim, relentless, destructive.

But Jamie is not Helen. There is a deeper strain in his nature. The possibilities of remorse lie deep but they are there, and Hugh is a noble Achilles rather than a selfish Agamemnon. Hence a happy ending may issue from the darkness of treachery and the fires of wrath. The theme is both ancient and new, ancient as the story of the love of David for Jonathan, "wonderful, passing the love of woman," new as the latest knowledge of the part of "blood brotherhood" among the hunting, warrior clan of primitive tribes, in the making of society. Three things, says Professor William Isaac Thomas in his book "Sex and Society", were and are most fundamental in the evolution of society, the tenderness associated with sex impulse, the maternal instinct, and comradeship among men. For how many centuries, in the long struggle of the human race against the wild animals, did the very life of society depend upon the co-operation, in bands, of primi-

tive men hunting game with crude weapons through trackless forests or over arid wastes, under the burning sun of the tropics, under the cold stars of the North! With danger on every hand, with life depending upon the support one of another, how man has learned the lesson of loyalty to the comrade group! How imagination kindles to the thought that these have conquered the world, making it soft and warm for us who follow! And how modern is the theme, for until recent investigations men have only glimpsed its universal meaning! "Hugh Glass" is the story of the agony of two souls, with the wide sky, mighty rivers, and storm-swept plains for the setting. For one of these the story is that of love, the sense of betrayal by a friend, hate, physical suffering, forgiveness. For the other, it is friendship, real yet less profound, panic followed by a treacherous act, blindness, the Eumenides of remorse. What elemental material!

It is a commonplace of literary criticism that the reader must be made to enter into sympathetic understanding of the life of each character. The first section of Hugh Glass is devoted to the unalloyed love of the old man and the young one. The one with giantlike body and large soul, the other a

> fancy-ridden child who played
> At manliness mid all those bearded men;

one slow to mirth or anger, for

> None laughed louder when the rare mood fell

And hate in him was like a still, white
hell,
A thing of doom not lightly reconciled;

the other such that

his one mood ne'er linked two hours to-
gether,

capable of reckless daring, for

No cloudy brooding went before his
wrath
That, like a thunder-squall wrecked not
its path
But raged upon what happened in its
way.

The reader sees how deeply Hugh loves Jamie, and that love becomes the most precious thing in all the story.

And once Hugh smiled his enigmatic
way
While poring long on Jamie's face and
said:
'So with their sons are women brought
to bed,
Sore wounded!'

* * *

So might a dawn-struck digit of the
moon
Dream back the rain of some old lunar
June
And ache through all its craters to be
green.

The task of holding the sympathy of the reader for the betrayer of a love so rare is no easy one, and the author has taken great care to reveal the terrible strain, the "abrasive dread," the devilish skill of Le Bon in bringing Jamie to the point of panic and flight. Then, during the long search for Jamie on the part of Hugh, it is oftenest the old love that comes back to Hugh and to the reader, softening the mood of each. Thus, while on one night he dreams of vengeance, on the next, falling asleep in chastened mood,

> It seemed that little Jim
> Had come to share a merry fire with him,
> And there had been no trouble 'twixt the two.
> And Jamie listened eagerly while Hugh
> Essayed a tangled tale of bears and men,
> Bread-root and stars. But ever now and then
> The shifting smoke-cloud dimmed the golden hair,
> The leal blue eyes.

When nearly exhausted on the divide between the Grand and the Moreau, Hugh's love comes back upon him.

> That day the wild geese flew
> Vague in a gray profundity of sky;
> And on into the night their muffled cry
> Haunted the moonlight like a far farewell.
> It made Hugh homesick, though he could not tell

For what he yearned; and in his fitful
sleeping
The cry became the sound of Jamie weeping,
Immeasurably distant.

On the following day Hugh becomes delirious:

The fighter slumbered and a maudlin
mood
Foretold the dissolution of the man.
He sobbed, and down his beard the big
tears ran.
And now the scene is changed; the bleak
wind's cry
Becomes a flight of bullets snarling by
From where on yonder summit skulk
the Rees—
Against the sky, in silhouette, he sees
The headstrong Jamie in the leaden rain.
And now serenely beautiful and slain
The dead lad lies within a gusty tent.

So it is that, though we see Hugh again and again in the mood to kill and hear his chant of doom at Kiowa, we know that he will forgive at last.

But for Jamie the reader demands suffering (this is another commonplace), but he also desires the reconciliation of the men. Fate pursues Jamie. The "eternal night" is spewed on him when Hugh's stolen rifle bursts in his hands! What irony! How grim was the laugh of Nemesis!

But (again a commonplace) remorse brings forgiveness, not only from Hugh and the reader, but from the gods as well. Long before Hugh finds the

youthful sufferer in the lodge of the Piegans, the older man has ceased

> to place above
> The act of loving, what he chanced to love.

He has learned the stern lesson of the ages that love is a universal thing, for the weak as for the strong, for the sinner as for the saint, a ministering angel for the lover and for the beloved.

Such is the story with all the remorseless truth of the Greeks, a tale that grips the reader from beginning to end. Its utter reality looms larger and larger as the drama unfolds its elemental lessons of passion and its serene philosophy. Let us add something as to its technique.

It may be questioned whether any other poem was ever so factual as the portion of Hugh Glass devoted to the Crawl. "Don Juan" in the shipwreck in places approaches it. William Stanley Braithwaite, the critic, has compared the rounding of the Horn in "Dauber" to the account of this portion of Hugh's journey; but no one who really enters into the two stories carries away from Masefield's tale even approximately so vivid a remembrance of suffering upon suffering as from the slow, killing monotony of toil and pain that sings the "epic of will." Of this Mr. Braithwaite has said, and the present writer agrees: "In pure objective description of physical endurance and the natural setting associated with it, that is the most extra-

ordinary, the most imaginative, the most striking thing in American poetry."

In order to reinstate in the reader every form of suffering through which Hugh passed, thirst, hunger, weakness, pain and, most of all, muscular sensation must be adequately expressed. Then there must be ever present, pressing down and enveloping the whole, the feeling of utter loneliness, desertion, betrayal. The effects of certain forms of suffering come singly and occasionally they all come together as in a flood. To secure this effect the story deals with the minutest matters. The incidents of the crawl are all small in detail but each big with destiny. Every item in the case is fateful.

Outwardly the facts are merely these: a sick and wounded man crawls the greater part of a hundred miles. In the journey no living enemy is encountered, "naught but the yielding distance and the lack." It is a struggle of a man against time and space. How make the reader feel it? The thing is to give him a consciousness of the slow progress of the journey. To this end the writer tells indirectly the actual distance made in successive days. Thus at the end of the first afternoon

> . . Hugh gained a rise
> Whence to the fading cincture of the skies
> A purpling panorama swept away.
> Scarce farther than a shout might carry, lay
> The place of his betrayal. He could see

The yellow blotch of earth where treachery
Had digged his grave.

A butte is used to the same purpose. It is the measure of a progress infinitely slow.

The butte, outstripped at eventide, now seemed
Intent to follow. Ever now and then
The crawler paused to calculate again
What dear-bought yawn of distance dwarfed the hill.
Close in the rear it soared, a Titan still,
Whose hand-in-pocket saunter kept the pace.

Now the lure of the ridge of the divide between the Grand and the Moreau makes vivid the appeal to the muscular sense. With Hugh we struggle toward the crest of the divide and the whole body yearns for the lush valleys, crystal brooks, and cooling shade that surely wait beyond. And when we see the "rumpled waste of yellow hills" we, as Hugh, are overwhelmed by the whole meaning of the betrayal made evident to every sense by the utter failure of so much endeavor to secure even a moment of reprieve.

Lest utter discouragement overwhelm the reader and Hugh, the butte is again used to measure distance, but this time it is distance achieved.

He turned to see the butte, that he might know
How little all his striving could avail
Against ill-luck. And lo, a finger-nail,

At arm-length held, could blot it out of
space!
A goading purpose and a creeping pace
Had dwarfed the Titan in a haze of blue!
And suddenly new power came to Hugh
With gazing on his masterpiece of will.
So fare the wise on Pisgah.

For longer stages the changes of the moon measure the time.

The significance of water in the journey is, of course, to be felt by inducing the sense of thirst. In the first afternoon

A taunting reek
Rose from the grudging seepage of the
creek,
Whereof Hugh drank and drank and still
would drink.

During the second afternoon

—, the lean creek's flow
Dwindled and dwindled steadily, until
At last a scooped-out basin would not
fill—
And thenceforth 'twas a way of mocking
dust.

* * *

The coulee deepened; yellow walls flung
high,
Sheer to the ragged strip of blinding sky,
Dazzled and sweltered in the glare of day.
Capricious draughts that woke and died
away
Into the heavy drowse, were breatht as
flame.

And midway down the afternoon, Hugh came
Upon a little patch of spongy ground.
His thirst became a rage. He gazed around,
Seeking a spring; but all about was dry
As strewn bones bleaching to a desert sky;
Nor did a clawed hole, bought with needed strength,
Return a grateful ooze. And when at length
Hugh sucked the mud, he spat it in disgust.
It had the acrid tang of broken trust,
The sweetish, tepid taste of feigning love!

On the night of the storm we come upon the torture of thirst in the strongest appeal to bodily sense.

In the hot hush Hugh heard his temples boom.
Thirst tortured. Motion was a languid pain.
Why seek some further nowhere on the plain?
Here might the kiotes feast as well as there.

* * *

And as he went, a muffled rumbling grew,
More felt than heard; for long it puzzled Hugh.
Somehow 'twas coextensive with his thirst,

Yet boundless; swollen blood-veins ere
they burst
Might give such warning, so he thought.

The sense of muscular strain is found both in waking hours and in dreams.

It seemed he ran
As wind above the creeping ways of man,
And came upon the place of his desire,
Where burned, far-luring as a beacon-
fire,
The face of Jamie. But the vengeful
stroke
Bit air. The darkness lifted like a smoke—
And it was early morning.

The immediate bodily effect of wounds and weakness appears in every attempt at movement.

Old habit of the body bade him rise;
But when he would obey, the hollow skies
Broke as a bubble punctured, and went
out.

* * *

Some consciousness of will the memory
gave:
He would get up. The painful effort
spent
Made the wide heavens billow as a tent
Wind-struck, the shaken prairie sag and
roll.

* * *

Sickened with torture he lay huddled
there

* * *

in vain
He struggled with a fine-spun mesh of pain
That trammelled him, until a yellow stream
Of day flowed down the white vale of a dream
And left it disenchanted in the glare.

It is difficult to conceive of shorter, more telling description of effects of pain.

The fact that pervades every moment of the crawl, giving the entire tone, is that of the treachery of a loved friend. Every difficulty, every defeat, is, to the mind of the man burning for vengeance and gradually becoming delirious with hunger and fatigue, a manifestation of a world-wide conspiracy of fraud. Every line is packed full with this "devouring ecstasy of flame." Jamie's face, his hair, his eyes haunt every thing in nature; treachery stares from sky and prairie, blue and yellow, "twin hues of falseness," lurks in the bubbling spring of alkali water, even reaches slyly over Hugh's shoulder and breaks the yarn whereby he sought to snare a gopher and defeat starvation.

Hugh is a man of imagination, he is something of an artist. Great heroism is always imaginative, often artistic. Hugh could not be the hero who caught Jamie's fancy unless he were a story teller.

—"A fellow that I knew,"
So nameless went the hero that was Hugh—

A mere pelt merchant, as it seemed to
him:
Yet trailing epic thunders through the
dim,
Whist world of Jamie's awe.

The memory pictures scattered through the poem, the gripping fancy that he is really dead, the chant of doom that he sings to the men at Kiowa—all reveal the essential artist in the hero; and once after he has found that "a goading purpose and a creeping pace have dwarfed the Titan in a haze of blue," we catch Hugh in the very throes of creative art.

As in a story
Some higher Hugh observed the baser
part.
So sits the artist throned above his art,
Nor recks the travail so the end be fair.
It seemed the wrinkled hills pressed in to
stare,
The arch of heaven was an eye a-gaze.
And as Hugh went, he fashioned many a
phrase
For use when, by some friendly ember-
light,
His tale of things endured should speed
the night
And all this gloom grow golden in the
sharing.

It would be a mistake to suppose all this impossible. Every artist has discovered that all men seek to be artists. No one who has lived among rough folk in the world of adventure but finds them all

seeking to be poets. The psychologist Tarde gives the whole philosophy of this phenomenon in "L'Opinion et La Foule," but the artist knows it by intuition.

Reading "Hugh Glass", one comes to understand what Neihardt means when he says that once he has seen a thing, he does not recall it, it is actually there at need. I will undertake to say that no poet ever saw the prairies until Neihardt came. The sense of wide spaces, of changes of season, nay, of the very moment of day or night is so vivid that the reader seems actually present on the scene. Was the sense of vast distances ever better portrayed than in the following: (Italics mine.)

> then Jamie was aware
> Of lonesome flatlands fading skyward there
> Beneath him, and, zigzag on either hand
> A purple haze denoted how the Grand
> Forked *wide 'twixt sunset and the polar star*?

The use of sunset for west and polar star for north gives the effect sought.

> But some *globose immensity of blue*
> Enfolded him at last.
>
> * * *
>
> Rousing a languid wonder, came on Hugh
> *The quiet, steep-arched splendor of the day.*
>
> * * *

He saw *the world's end* kindle to a blaze
And up the smoky steeps pale heralds run.

The use of "world's end" for east is another of the devices by which the sense of vast space is induced.

Far-flung as dawn, collusive sky and plain
Stared bleak denial back.

* * *

Sky-rims and yet more sky-rims steep to climb—
That simulacrum of enduring time—
The hundred *empty* miles 'twixt him and where
The stark Missouri ran.

How we feel the loneliness of Jamie in his search for Hugh when

The sunset reared a luminous phantom spire
That crumbling sifted ashes down the sky!

Note the following sunset pictures:

Far-spread, shade-dimpled in the level glow.

* * *

The red sun pausing on the dusty rim.

* * *

Now when the eve in many-shaded grays

Wove the day's shroud, and through the lower lands
Lean fog-arms groped with chilling spirit-hands.

* * *

In a smudge of red
The west burned low; hill summits, yet alight,
And pools of gloom anticipating night
Mottled the landscape to the dull blue rim.

* * *

Slowly the sense of distances came back
As with the waning day the great wind fell.
The pale sun set upon a frozen hell.
The wolves howled.

* * *

And many times the wide autumnal blue
Burned out and deepened to a dark of stars

The whole lyric effect of the coming of spring is found in the fifth division of the poem. Compared with the following, all other attempts at prairie scenes except some in "Three Friends" seem pale indeed.

Here at length was born
Upon the southern slopes the baby Spring,
A timid, fretful, ill-begotten thing,
A-suckle at the winter's withered paps:
Not such as when, announced by thunder-claps

And ringed with swords of lightning, she would ride,
The haughty victrix and the mystic bride,
Clad splendidly as never Sheba's Queen,
Before her marching multitudes of green
In many bannered triumph! Grudging, slow,
Amid the fraying fringes of the snow
The bunch-grass sprouted; and the air was chill.
Along the northern slopes 'twas winter still,
And no root dreamed what Triumph-over-Death
Was nurtured now in some bleak Nazareth
Beyond the crest to sunward.

On they spurred
Through vacancies that waited for the bird,
And everywhere the Odic Presence dwelt.
The Southwest blew, the snow began to melt;
And when they reached the valley of the Snake,
The Niobrara's ice began to break,
And all night long and all day long it made
A sound as of a random cannonade
With rifles snarling down a skirmish line.
The geese went over. Every tree and vine
Was dotted thick with leaf-buds when they saw
The little river of Keyapaha

Grown mighty for the moment. Then they came,
One evening when all thickets were aflame
With pale green witch-fires and the wind-flowers blew,
To where the headlong Niobrara threw
His speed against the swoln Missouri's flank
And hurled him roaring to the further bank—
A giant staggered by a pigmy's sling.
Thence, plunging ever deeper into Spring,
Across the greening prairie east by south
They rode, and, just above the Platte's wide mouth,
Came, weary with the trail, to Atkinson.

There all the vernal wonder-work was done:
No care-free heart might find aught lacking there.
The dove's call wandered in the drowsy air;
A love-dream brooded in the lucent haze.
Priapic revellers, the shrieking jays
Held mystic worship in the secret shade.
Woodpeckers briskly plied their noisy trade
Along the tree-boles, and their scarlet hoods
Flashed flame-like in the smoky cotton-woods.

What lacked? Not sweetness in the sun-lulled breeze;
The plum bloom murmurous with bumble-bees

Was drifted deep in every draw and
slough.
Not color; witcheries of gold and blue
The dandelion and the violet
Wove in the green. Might not the sad
forget,
The happy here have nothing more to
seek?
Lo, yonder by that pleasant little creek,
How one might loll upon the grass and
fish
And build the temple of one's wildest
wish
'Twixt nibbles! Surely there was quite
enough
Of wizard-timber and of wonder-stuff
To rear it nobly to the blue-domed roof!

But no one knows better than Neihardt that there is no such thing as description of nature for its own sake. Each description is merely a part of the development of the great mood of the epic. The reader sees all through the eyes and in the mood of the persons of the tale, and each line carries the story a measurable distance toward the denouement. This recalls the principle heretofore stated, that the writing of a poem is like the work of the architect; ornament is nothing in itself, but must be an integral part of the structure.

Immediately on the publication of "Hugh Glass" in 1914, some progressive teachers, struck by its significance for American youth and by the remarkable power of the performance, began its use in the class room. So instant and eager was the response of

the students that a demand from widely separated parts of the country arose for its publication with notes, maps and all else desirable for class room use. Accordingly the Macmillan Company put out a school edition of "Hugh Glass" late in the summer of 1919. By February the first edition had been exhausted and in March a second printing was necessary. A signal honor indeed is this to an American poet, for be it known that "The Song of Hugh Glass" is the first poem by an American since the days of the Cambridge group to be published in a volume by itself for use in the schools!

Testimony from trained teachers as to the value and availability of the work is emphatic and enthusiastic. With unanimous voice they say: "The students, young and old, are fascinated with the story. It teaches itself. It appeals especially to boys, by reason of the rugged courage depicted. It creates desire to read other works concerning the same time and region. It makes them proud of their country. We can use it anywhere from the eighth grade to the senior year of the high school, and always with the best results."

Many are the teachers who believe that this work will shortly find its way into the curricula of all American schools. So great is Neihardt's gift to the nation!

TWO

"The Song of Three Friends," the second in time of publication, in point of sequence precedes "The

Song of Hugh Glass." Though concerned with the same country and type of life, it does not repeat either the scenes or the mood of the earlier poem. The second volume has greater variety. Almost from the beginning "Hugh Glass" induces a sense of broken friendship, while for many pages in the "Friends" there is the mood of joy. There are jest and song and story, associations in work, feast and trade, with a momentary glimpse of love; pictures of the freezing of the stream and the breaking of the ice in spring, and all with a joyous overtone, with the slow creeping of Fate as the deeper note. Then, the "Friends" is the more dramatic and remorselessly tragic story. It goes with a headlong rush, with stroke on stroke, while in "Glass" the climax is reconciliation, and the approach is properly very gradual.

The gripping story of "Three Friends" runs as follows: Will Carpenter of Anglo-Saxon descent; Mike Fink, Irish; Talbeau of Norman-French extraction, are those who stick closer than brothers. The former two are large men, the last is small. All are of superior physical prowess, but because of his lesser size Talbeau is scarcely a possible rival for either of the others. He admires and loves his larger comrades with passionate loyalty. Fink is apparently a jovial fellow until at length the bully, traitor and coward all emerge. But, paradoxical as it may seem, he is lovable to the end. Carpenter is quiet, reliable, tender and tremendously brave. The larger men were the crack marksmen of the

company of a hundred and were accustomed to indicate their mutual love and confidence by shooting each at a target on the head of the other at sixty paces, the target being a whisky cup filled to the brim.

"And ever was the tincup smitten fair."

When Major Henry goes into camp for the winter at the mouth of the Yellowstone, a party of Bloods come, urging that a number of the company go up to the mouth of the Musselshell to trade with them. As a result the three comrades spend the winter on the Musselshell and there "the net is cast," for "there was a woman," a half-breed girl whose white father was one of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Fink loved her and she loved Carpenter. Her choice of Carpenter makes Fink an enemy of his former chum. At this point Talbeau emerges from comparative obscurity in the narrative to the leading part, and the remainder of the story is the tale of his endeavors first to bring his comrades together and second to save the soul of Fink after the latter has murdered Carpenter.

In his first endeavor at reconciliation, Talbeau succeeds only in bringing on the fight that hardens Fink to the point of murder; the second attempt yet more tragically results in the murder itself under the guise of the friendly shooting of the cup. While Talbeau was warned by suspicion on the part of Carpenter against Fink, he holds the latter innocent of intent to kill.

The remaining two are then sent by Major Henry on an errand to General Ashley, who was at that time ascending the Missouri with a second band of a hundred men. After a desperate race with a prairie fire, Fink, while drunk, boasts that he meant to kill Carpenter. Talbeau undertakes to make him repentant. While Fink is asleep he takes the gun, ammunition and water, arouses Fink and drives him into the bad lands. There, unhappily, Fink escapes his pursuer, who had not meant to kill, and perishes of thirst, starvation and fear. The end of the story is the finding of Fink's body by Talbeau, when the whole tragic effect of his well-meant intervention overwhelms him. What an Orestes is he and what Eumenides of remorse shall follow him all his days!

A conscious uniting of his heroes with those of the past is found in these lines from the introduction to the poem:

> And now no more the mackinaws come
> down,
> Their gunwales low with costly packs and
> bales,
> A wind of wonder in their shabby sails,
> Their homing oars flung rhythmic to the
> tide:
> And nevermore the masted keelboats
> ride
> Missouri's stubborn waters on the lone
> Long zigzag journey to the Yellowstone.
> Their hulks have found the harbor ways
> that know
> The ships of all the Sagas, long ago—

A moony haven where no loud gale stirs.
The trappers and the singing *voyageurs*
Are comrades now of Jason and his crew,
Foregathered in that timeless rendezvous
Where come at last all seekers of the
Fleece.

Was the beauty of the prairie in the spring ever better sung than in these lines?—

So, they say,
Went forth a hundred singing men that
day;
And girlish April went ahead of them.
The music of her trailing garment's hem
Seemed scarce a league ahead. A little
speed
Might yet almost surprise her in the deed
Of sorcery; for, ever as they strove,
A gray-green smudge in every poplar
grove
Proclaimed the recent kindling. Aye, it
seemed
That bird and bush and tree had only
dreamed
Of song and leaf and blossom, till they
heard
The young men's feet; when tree and
bush and bird
Unleashed the whole conspiracy of awe!
Pale green was every slough about the
Kaw;
About the Platte, pale green was every
slough;
And still the pale green lingered at the
Sioux,
So close they trailed the marching of the
South.

But when they reached the Niobrara's
mouth
The witchery of a spring had taken flight
And, like a girl grown woman over night,
Young summer glowed.

No Greek hero was ever so beautiful as Fink—

Bronzed with exposure to the wind and
sun,
Behold the splendid creature that was
Fink!
You see him strolling to the river's brink,
All ease, and yet tremendously alive.
He pauses, poised on tiptoe for the dive,
And momently it seems the mother mud,
Quick with a mystic seed whose sap is
blood,
Mysteriously rears a human flower.
Clean as a windless flame the lines of
power
Run rhythmic up the stout limbs, muscle-
laced,
Athwart the ropy gauntness of the waist,
The huge round girth of chest, whereover
spread
Enormous shoulders. Now above his
head
He lifts his arms where big thews merge
and flow
As in some dream of Michelangelo;
And up along the dimpling back there run,
Like lazy serpents stirring in the sun,
Slow waves that break and pile upon the
slope
Of that great neck in swelling rolls,
a-grope

Beneath the velvet softness of the skin.
Now suddenly the lean waist grows more thin,
The deep chest on a sudden grows more deep;
And with the swiftness of a tiger's leap,
The easy grace of hawks in swooping flight,
That terrible economy of might
And beauty plunges outward from the brink.

In the Iliad only kings and demi-gods fought and they had spears and arrows. Our democratic pioneers fought and slew with the fist.

Once again
A silence fell as, leaping up, the men
Were mingled briefly in a storm of blows.
Now, tripping like a dancer on his toes,
The blond man sparred; while, like a baited bear,
Half blinded with the lust to crush and tear,
Fink strove to clutch that something lithe and sleek
That stung and fled and stung. Upon his cheek
A flying shadow laid a vivid bruise;
Another—and his brow began to ooze
Slow drops that spattered on his bearded jaw.
Again that shadow passed—his mouth went raw,
And like a gunshot wound it gaped and bled.

Fink roared with rage and plunged with lowered head
Upon this thing that tortured, hurled it back
Amid the crowd. One heard a thud and smack
Of rapid blows on bone and flesh—and then
One saw the tall man stagger clear again
With gushing nostrils and a bloody grin,
And down his front the whiteness of the skin
Was striped with flowing crimson to the waist.
Unsteadily he wheeled about and faced
The headlong hate of his antagonist.
Now toe to toe and fist to flying fist,
They played at give and take; and all the while
The blond man smiled that riddle of a smile,
As one who meditates upon a jest.

Yet surely he was losing! Backward pressed,
He strove in vain to check his raging foe.
Fink lunged and straightened to a shoulder blow
With force enough to knock a bison down.
The other dodged it, squatting. Then the town
Discovered what a smile might signify.
For, even as the futile blow went by,
One saw the lithe white form shoot up close in,
A hooked white arm jab upward to the chin—

Once—twice—and yet again. With eyes
a-stare,
His hands aloft and clutching at the air,
Fink tottered backward, limply lurched
and fell.

If Achilles wailing over his early death is a hero, what of Carpenter, as he stood, certain of death at the hand of his treacherous comrade, not weeping, but with

"The grin of some droll humor on his face"?

And how about the mating pee-wees and the catbird for a Greek chorus?

"We're ready, Mike!"
A murmur ran and died
Along the double line of eager men.
Fink raised his gun, but set it down again
And blew a breath and said: "I'm gittin'
dhry!
So howld yer noddle shtiddy, Bill, my
b'y,
And don't ye shpill me whisky!' Cedar-
straight
The tall man stood, the calm of brooding
Fate
About him. Aye, and often to the end
Talbeau would see that vision of his
friend—
A man-flower springing from the fresh
green sod,
While, round about, the bushes burned
with God

And mating pee-wees fluted in the brush.
They heard a gun lock clicking in the
hush.

They saw Fink sighting—heard the rifle
crack,
And saw beneath the spreading powder
rack
The tall man pitching forward.
Echoes fled
Like voices in a panic. Then Mike said:
"Bejasus, and ye've shpilled me whisky,
Bill!"

A catbird screamed. The crowd stood
very still
As though bewitched.

"And can't ye hear?" bawled Fink;
"I say, I'm dhry—and now ye've
shpilled me drink!"
He stooped to blow the gases from his
gun.
And now men saw Talbeau. They saw
him run
And stoop to peer upon the prostrate man
Where now the mingling blood and
whisky ran
From oozing forehead and the tilted cup.
And in the hush a sobbing cry grew up:
"My God! You've killed him, Mike!"

Then growing loud,
A wind of horror blew among the
crowd
And set it swirling round about the dead.
And over all, there roared a voice that
said:
"I niver mint to do it, b'ys, I swear!
The divil's in me gun!" Men turned to
stare

Wild-eyed upon the center of that sound,
And saw Fink dash his rifle to the ground,
As 'twere the hated body of his wrong.

Once more arose that wailing, like a song,
Of one who called and called upon his friend.

The older inhabitants of the West can recall the prairie fires of a generation ago, with their terrible beauty and destructiveness of man and of wild life. Gone are they like the Indian and the buffalo, but Neihardt has given us a picture of one of them:

They crossed the valley, topped a rise, looked back,
Nor dared to gaze. The firm, familiar world,
It seemed, was melting down, and Chaos swirled
Once more across the transient realms of form
To scatter in the primal atom-storm
The earth's rich dust and potency of dreams.
Infernal geysers gushed, and sudden streams
Of rainbow flux went roaring up the skies
Through ghastly travesties of Paradise,
Where, drowsy in a tropic summertide,
Strange gaudy flowers bloomed and aged and died—
Whole seasons in a moment. Bloody rain,
Blown slant like April silver, spewed the plain

To mock the fallow sod; and where it fell
Anemones and violets of hell
Foreran the fatal summer.

* * * * *

Overhead
Inverted seas of color rolled and broke,
And from the combers of the litten smoke
A stinging spindrift showered.

On they went,
Unconscious of duration or extent,
Of everything but that from which they fled.
Now, sloping to an ancient river bed,
The prairie flattened. Plunging downward there,
The riders suddenly became aware
How surged, beneath, a mighty shadow-stream—
As though the dying Prairie dreamed a dream
Of yesterage when all her valleys flowed
With Amazons, and monster life abode
Upon her breast and quickened in her womb.
And from that rushing in the flame-smeared gloom
Unnumbered outcries blended in a roar.
The headlong ponies struck the sounding shore
And reared upon their haunches. Far and near,
The valley was a-flood with elk and deer
And buffalo and wolves and antelope
And whatsoever creature slough and slope

Along the path of terror had to give.
Torrential with the common will to live,
The river of unnumbered egos swept
The ponies with it.

When Mike perishes in the bad lands, in his last hours it is no longer Talbeau that he fears but the ghost of Carpenter.

Against the gully wall
He shrank and huddled with his eyes
shut tight,
For fear a Presence, latent in the night,
Should walk before him.

Then it seemed he ran
Through regions alien to the feet of Man,
A weary way despite the speed of sleep,
And came upon a river flowing deep
Between black crags that made the sky
a well.
And eerily the feeble starlight fell
Upon the flood with water lilies strown.
But when he stooped, the stream began
to moan,
And suddenly from every lily pad
A white face bloomed, unutterably sad
And bloody-browed.

* * *

The deeps went blue; on mimic dome
and spire
The daylight faded to a starry awe.
Mike slept; and lo, they marched along
the draw—
Or rather burned—tall, radiantly white!
A hushed procession, tunnelling the night

They came with lips that smiled and
brows that bled,
And each one bore a tin cup on its head,
A brimming cup. But ever as they came
Before him, like a draught-struck candle
flame
They shuddered and were snuffed.

To the writer, in comparison to this, the noisy ghosts of Shakespeare are poor things indeed.

Space forbids to tell of Talbeau's despairing search for Mike through the bad lands. Nemesis had determined that he whose love was more than the love of woman for his friends should cause the death of each. His suffering is immensely beyond that of the hero of any drama, who is permitted the mercy of his own death. The story closes with this gripping scene:

A sentry crow,
Upon a sunlit summit, saw Talbeau
And croaked alarm. The noise of many
wings,
In startled flight, and raucous chatterings
Arose. What feast was interrupted there
A little way ahead? 'Twould be the bear!
He plodded on. The intervening space
Sagged under him; and, halting at the
place
Where late the flock had been, he strove
to break
A grip of horror. Surely now he'd wake
And see the morning quicken in the skies!

The Thing remained!—It hadn't any
eyes—

The pilfered sockets bore a pleading
stare!

A long, hoarse wail of anguish and des-
pair
Aroused the echoes. Answering, arose
Once more the jeering chorus of the
crows.

A close study of the poem reveals its careful psychology. In teaching it to a freshman college class the writer has found much interest in watching the reactions of the students to the men of the story at various stages of its development. Almost Fink is the hero. His physical beauty, his prowess and marksmanship, his joy in living, his wit and the voice that "could glorify a song" give a charm to his personality that entrances the reader and at first dwarfs the other men. Then, for many pages, none of the comrades is prominent, while the adventures of the entire party develop and bring the three to the Musselshell. There the splendor of Carpenter shines forth:

A goodly sight, indeed!
Upstanding, eagle-faced and eagle-eyed,
The ease of latent power in his stride,
He dwarfed the panting pony that he led;
And when the level sunlight 'round his
head
Made glories in the frosted beard and
hair,
Some Gothic fighting god seemed walk-
ing there,
Strayed from the dim Hercynian woods
of old.

Then while "doom quickens in the fancy of a maid," while he wins the card game, the terrible fist fight and goes with foreknowledge to his death in the shooting of the cup, all with a lightsome courage, Carpenter captures the imagination of the reader. But the deeper nature of Talbeau, his sensitivity, his fairly poetic responses to the situation, slowly render him the beautiful and tragic figure of the story.

The poet has revealed these men to us as we learn such men in actual life. The charm and brilliancy of a new personality take one by storm; the laconic and courageous emerge more slowly and the deeps of love lie far below the surface, only to appear in hours of tragic meaning.

To speak of less important but no less subtle things, the part of Carpenter's smile in the development of the story is worthy of note. To Talbeau his smile seems friendly always, but to Fink it becomes an intolerable grin, a leer of triumph. The essential thing in Fink is his vanity. Even in his bluff and appreciative description of his fight with Talbeau one knows that they would never have been friends had Talbeau and not Fink won the bout. While we cannot know and the author wisely refrains from telling us how deep was the love of Fink for the Long Knife's daughter, yet we question whether his hatred of Carpenter is not due more to the triumph of the latter in a game in which the pawn happens to be a woman than to anything deeper. Had Mike won the card game, how easily

all else might have been overlooked! And now the grin begins to play havoc, for in the fist fight that nervous smile of the fighter is, we may be sure, to his opponent an exhibition of insolence that drives him mad. Henceforward, the poet "plays up" the grin more definitely. When Fink seems about to make advances toward reconciliation, the grin drives out the angel and replaces the devil in his soul. When he faces Carpenter in the "Shooting of the Cup," and, after aiming, sets his gun upon the ground, we may wonder whether he fully knows that he is about to stain his life with murder, and whether, as he again sights along the barrel, that "grin of some droll humor" may not have recalled and made "visibly immense" the long series of humiliations through which he had passed. But his rifle shot, piercing the forehead of his comrade, cannot erase the grin. It is written on Mike's soul and comes again and again from the weird land of shadows to mock him in the hour of doom.

Even the horses have personality. The roan stallion that carries Mike in the race with the prairie fire is a sluggish animal, lacks courage and bottom, is dependent on the other horse. On the other hand, the mare is wiry and full of grit, clings to life and reaches the waters of the Little Missouri, leaving the larger horse a charred skeleton upon the blackened prairie.

THREE

Some critics underestimate the value of the common man because they are not accustomed to see his genuine character celebrated in verse. In this respect, poetry has lagged behind society in the development of the democratic spirit. To see a plainsman lifted to the plane of Ajax or Odysseus comes as a shock. It is hard to realize that every man is potentially a hero and that the common man is more likely to be a real hero than one born in the purple. His struggle with Fate is inevitable, and had it not in all ages been met with determination the race would not be upon the earth. Universal courage was and is a condition of survival.

To take each major characteristic of the men in Neihardt's work we find that all have physical courage. What is physical courage? It is, first of all, a glorious joy in being alive, a never dying assertion that life is worth while. Hence it meets disaster with magnificent resistance. This is what grips Hugh Glass when, wounded, deserted, robbed of the means of life, he summons his energies and becomes

> So thewed to strive, so engined to prevail
> And make harsh fate the zany of a tale

that he begins and carries to completion the "Crawl" across the desolate and hostile prairies. There is in this a deeper, more fundamental courage, a more

inspiring exhibition of a racial inheritance than can be found in the leadership of an army chief supported and pushed to glory by all his surroundings. Where would be civilization or even mere human existence today minus this common glory of the common man? Is it a theme worth while? And has it ever been sung before in such universal terms?

But physical courage doesn't exist alone. Its very nature is that it holds existence cheap in comparison with other values. This is illustrated in Carpenter, who knowing himself by reason of strength and skill the physical superior of Fink, yet plays the game, throws away his advantage to expose himself to be the target of his treacherous friend. This, too, is an illustration in a common man of a universal and infinitely precious aspect of human nature, that by reason of which men "play up" to the standard set, living heroic lives and dying heroic deaths. It is only Satan who says, "All that a man hath will he give for his life."

Is there a more beautiful thing than friendship? Talbeau, sensitive, fairly poetic, called to watch his friends perish by reason of his efforts to bring them together, is a common man. Possibly common men love with greater devotion than those who reach the summits of power. The world is not so much with them. And will anyone undertake to estimate the value of friendship in the evolution of man, and can it be better sung than to the accompaniment of struggle and danger? How Talbeau loved his friends! How he subordinated him-

self to them! How willing would he have been to die for either!

> He could have touched across the ember-glow
> Mike's brooding face—yet Mike was far away.
> And oh, that nothing more than distance lay
> Between them—any distance with an end!
> How tireless then in running to his friend
> A man might be! For suddenly he knew
> That Mike would have him choose between the two.
> How could he choose 'twixt Carpenter and Fink?
> How idle were a choice 'twixt food and drink
> When, choosing neither, one were sooner dead!

David and Jonathan were king and prince, but were their souls finer, and is it worth while to find in common men the pure gold of friendship?

Truly friendship is beautiful, but not often is it tested as in the case of Hugh Glass. To forgive in a friend weakness, cowardice, betrayal directed against one's self is more than friendship. Hugh forgave Jamie because the latter "knew not what he did." A Scotch preacher has remarked that Hugh was a Calvinist. His whole attitude toward life had the serene and lofty spirit of the time that produced Milton and Cromwell. Such an

one does not hold a grudge. To do so is too personal. Achilles loved Patroclus and avenged his death in brutal manner. Hugh loved Jamie as one might think the angels love. And Hugh was a common man!

But how of the one heroine, the Long Knife's daughter? She is better than Helen or Guinevere. She wooed her lover according to the rite of her tribe and she was true to him. Had she been Helen she would have accepted one of the comrades and eloped with the other. As shown elsewhere she is properly little more than an incident in the poem, but at least she does not shine with the baleful gleam of the harlot. How foolish to look for the meaning of the Iliad in the character of Helen or for that of the "Song of Three Friends" in that of the Indian girl! But the latter is the more attractive.

It is sometimes urged that these men had no vision, that they knew not the social meaning of their task. It is realism, and orthodox critics of poetry, unlike critics of life, are not ready for realism. One is tempted to ask whether such critics have ever heard of that significant bit of realism, the psychology of the unconscious. Few of the leaders of history actually consciously seek a social end. The literature of the past sought to make good this seeming defect in nature by supplying the vision. Æneas goes to Avernus and there sees Roman civilization arising from the leavings of the Greeks and the merciless Achilles. He thus be-

comes a prophet as well as a great adventurer. But everybody knows that new countries are conquered because men are driven by hunger and lust of adventure. It is good psychology for Vergil to give Æneas a vision he didn't have and didn't need, but it is not realism, and modern poetry demands the note of reality.

It is worth while to inspire in the race an appreciation of the spirit and achievement of these bands of common men whose

> —names are written deep across the land
> In pass and trail and river, like a rune.

The conquest of the land is a race conquest and has not been monopolized by those we know as leaders. Neihardt rests in the serene consciousness that the world belongs to all who suffer and overcome. Out of the ruck, arising ever clearer to view, comes the common man; and on the far-off heights of time he shall come to his own.

The writer would like to leave with the reader an impression of the poet as he now is. Perhaps this can be done in no better way than by a summary of his life philosophy. Recently Neihardt, at the request of the author, briefly stated this philosophy as follows:

"I can have no dependable standards for conduct on this planet save those that have been evolved through race experience. All my sanctions for conduct must be social sanctions. The Race and not the individual is the unit. As a man, and as a maker, I regard myself as a vortex of social energy, a

momentary whirl in the stream of racial consciousness that flows out of the prehistoric past into the fog of the future. I (like every other man) am a focusing point for certain currents of the stream. It is the stream that makes me, and my larger identity is the stream itself, not the momentary whirl which I realize through egoism. This egoism is an illusory device for facilitating the whirl that I regard as myself, to the end that I may the more vigorously function in the process, which is absolutely impersonal. There was a time when I laid the emphasis of my life upon my individuality, but now I think I see that 'the world is the whole of me,' and that after I have functioned through the illusory device of egoism, I will be able to achieve the supreme renunciation which must be the goal of any effective philosophy. The whirl in the stream that I regard as myself is justified only as it functions as a part of the whole process from the beginning. Anything that I make cannot be regarded as an individual product; it is a social product, the result of merging social impulses at the point of their incidence, that point, for the moment, being known as John Neihardt. At present my function, as I understand it, seems to be this: that I should preserve the tremendous mood of heroism that the Westering Race evolved in the region west of the Missouri River during the first nine decades of the nineteenth century. I believe that the inclusive virtue is courage—courage to endure that one may function in the social process. The moods of courage

that the Race has developed at the various stages of its westward advance across the planet include what is most precious in race development.

"But at last the ego must be merged in the mass, the eddy be lost in the stream. My larger identity is the race itself. And so it is with every man.

"It may be asked: What allowance does this philosophy make for a possible continuation of life beyond bodily death? The answer is clear. If survival can be proved (and much has already been done in that direction), it will be *human* survival. The human stream will continue to flow in accordance with universal principles under conditions that we do not now understand. And so my philosophy must hold good in any conceivable phase of continued life."

Here we leave our poet, having achieved, through creative endeavor, this fine and original adjustment to life, an adjustment indeed fitted to the needs of the twentieth century. May it bring a sense of safety and blessing to the troubled spirit of man.

THE following pages contain extracts from other critical appreciations of Neihardt's poetry

THE SONG OF THREE FRIENDS

"John G. Neihardt's 'The Song of Three Friends' comes from a poet of proved high accomplishment, whose work must always be taken seriously by the critic.—In this story-poem of the sturdy pioneers who made possible our later civilization, using the rhyming pentameter for his narrative, and in an idiom as stark in its realism as are the scenes depicted, Mr. Neihardt deepens the impression made upon me by his earlier poem (The Song of Hugh Glass), and has done a boldly fine, striking piece of epic verse, which should strengthen his position as an original and very gifted American artist.—The narrative culminates in a scene of tremendous, grim power, and throughout the psychology seems to me simple, true and sound.—Mr. Neihardt has genuine dramatic vision."—*Richard Burton in The Bellman.*

"Literature of a high order.—Mr. Neihardt possesses in marked degree the qualities of the artist in being able always to produce the desired effect, whether of despair, terror, or wistful beauty; and he is gifted with the attributes of the popular story writer in being capable of arousing interest and maintaining it at high-water mark until he has had his say."—*The Argonaut* (*San Francisco*).

"Alive with interest as the great American epic."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

"There is a striking description of a prairie fire in the book, and the story of the choking flight is as good as that of Glass's crawl in the earlier volume."—*New York Evening Post.*

"It is told in eight episodes, each of which is marked by wonderful dramatic and descriptive powers. Merely as a story, the work moves us as we have seldom been moved by a prose romance, while there are passages and passages over which we linger in the hope of embedding them in the memory.—Homeric are the figures in this stirring epic of the love and hate of strong men."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"Mr Neihardt's intimate knowledge of western history joined to his rare gifts of poetic expression, render peculiarly

fortunate his assumption of the role of a Homer for this wonderful western epic."—*Philadelphia North American.*

"It has the big rhythmic sweep of something elemental in man, which is a part of the wild, untamed background of the Northwest, a feeling in all its glory which Mr. Neihardt seems to get in all his narrative. This cycle of poems of the heroic fur-trading period of American history that Mr. Neihardt is creating on epic lines, is one of the profoundly notable and one of the few original things in the development of American poetry."—*William Stanley Braithwaite in The Boston Transcript.*

"John G. Neihardt has given us a poem of 126 pages—a tragic saga—that may be read aloud with unflagging interest. This rare feat has been accomplished in 'The Song of Three Friends.'—Mr. Neihardt has both the backward and the forward vision of the true poet, and is richly literate, as we see in the fine foreword to this volume, as well as in the easy allusiveness of his verse."—*The New York Sun.*

"The first of the series, 'The Song of Hugh Glass,' attracted instant attention on its appearance some years ago, and this poem has the same singularly compelling energy of movement combined with sound poetic interpretation.—The ancient powers of narrative poetry, which have functioned so slightly in recent times, are here in no small degree revived.—One finds himself swept into the current of the narrative and borne along by the sheer gusto of its stream."—*Raymond M. Alden in The Nation.*

"Just as one grows thoroughly disgusted over the outlook for American poetry and broods over the lack of authentic voices here, there arrives a singer like John G. Neihardt! What Noyes did for Drake and the Spanish Armada, Neihardt will do, without doubt, for that romantic period in our history when the Ashley-Henry men traversed the Upper Missouri River.—No novelist could have introduced his characters more skillfully.—It is a beautiful piece of work, American through and through, a mosaic with many a deft design, and one is uplifted and exalted in the reading of its resounding lines."—*Charles Hanson Towne in The Bookman.*

"Not Masefield at his best excels in dramatic power and vivid description the work of this virile poet of the West.—The theme is Homeric and calls for a man of large vision and matchless technique to do it justice. Neihardt has both. He is a classicist as well as blood brother to the Blackfoot, and in this rare com-

bination is evolved the type of seer who is of kin to the old Greek bard."—*Samuel T. Clover in The Richmond (Va.) Journal.*

"One asks more of poetry than the perfect lyric, more than entertainment for the moment; one asks continuity of illusion, the ability to live continuously old lives, and many of them, over again. And it is this one finds in Neihardt's narrative poetry. —Mr. Neihardt succeeds admirably with his characterizations of the men and in the recreating of the atmosphere. No true American can read the two sections, 'Ashley's Hundred' and 'The Up-Stream Men' without a thrill of patriotic devotion for the land of his birth."—*The Review of Reviews.*

"If one reads Mr. Neihardt's note before beginning the perusal of the text, he is apt to hesitate with the fear that he is about to plunge into one of those epics of the study like the 'Argonautica' of Apollonius Rhodius. But three pages out in the song, one will find that he is embarked on the real flood, and will rejoice more and more as he runs with the tide. The story is told with Homeric directness, with the same joy in life and the same regret in death.— The poem is full of Greek reminiscences, direct and indirect. One can open the book anywhere and recognize the debt to classical literature. The author has used this material unconsciously, so far as the reader is concerned. Swinburne gives the impression of wilful quotation or imitation, but here the reminiscence seems incidental. Neihardt uses it for those who know; for those who know not, it makes no difference. A man can read and enjoy the book without a thought of Greek literature. If he knows much, he is all the more delighted with what he finds; and he will find much."—*Marion Clyde Weir in The Detroit News.*

"Of Mr. John G. Neihardt I may say, as says Sir Philip Sidney, 'He cometh upon you with a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner.'—It has indisputably the great quality of making the reader live the poem with all the men in it and the vast nature in which it moves. It isn't free verse, but it frees the spirit. Salutations to Mr. John G. Neihardt!"—*William Marion Reedy in the St. Louis Mirror.*

THE SONG OF HUGH GLASS

"A narrative of far more convincing interest than any Masefield has told, with the possible exception of 'Dauber'; far more human, real and powerful than any Noyes has yet exhibited.—The Crawl is the most extraordinary, the most imaginative, the most striking thing in American poetry."—*William Stanley Braithwaite in The Boston Transcript.*

"Stands out among most books of modern verse as a redwood overtops spruce and jackpine."—*Grand Rapids Press.*

"In 'The Song of Hugh Glass' American literature is furnished with a really great and powerful epic poem."—*Duluth Herald.*

"The unwearying detail of that fearful crawl for life stands almost alone as a poetic attempt. I can think of only one comparable instance. It is the sort of thing that Byron nearly did in 'Mazeppa'—would have done if he had had the patience. . . Mr. Neihardt has done a big thing and it is to the big things of the past that one is forced to liken it."—*Chicago Evening Post.*

"From whence has come this flood of sincerity and dramatic appeal? The book absolutely compels attention. The language is so harmonious, so picturesque; the situations unfold with such vivid force and so much naturalness; and the tragic and the lovely, the awful and the contemptible, are so unerringly contrasted that there is nothing to do but read, breathlessly, stirred completely out of oneself by the tale."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

"'The Song of Hugh Glass' is one of those well-born poems which draw their themes from the author's neighborhood and their inspiration straight from his heart. . . . Mr. Neihardt has conveyed his landscape. He has not spelled it out with the assiduity of the literalist, and it reaches us perhaps more through the pores in the words than through the words themselves. Eventually the reader ingathers a sense of something very old and very young, spacious, firm, and bright, a landscape that is not man's leman or man's saint, but his stalwart and clear-eyed comrade."—*O. W. Firkins in The Nation.*

"Four poets made 1915 the most memorable year in recent American literature—if not in the whole range of American letters. These men are Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Lincoln Colcord and John G. Neihardt. . . . I believe Neihardt's poem

is the biggest of the four. . . . 'The Song of Hugh Glass' is the really great poem of the year. The 'Crawl' is one of the most remarkable things in American history; and Neihardt's description has given it a poetic immortality that will enshrine it in our hearts forever."—*John Wilson Townsend in The Lexington (Ky.) Leader.*

" . . . Let us fervently pray that these Songs shall take rank with, if not precedence over, Scott and Tennyson in our schools. . . . Nothing can define the nature of this book but a reading of it—and that is an experience worth living indeed; it is to have caught up for you into a work that is to belong to World Literature, the places you have seen, where you may have lived, or where your friends may live, the deeds of brave men which are your heritage and which are more integral to your past than ever the events of the Aeneid were to the Romans or those of the Arthuriad to the Britons."—*Roger L. Sergel in The Yale Review.*

". . . . It enhances the opinion I expressed to you (in connection with The Song of Three Friends) that you are making the most important contribution yet made to the foundation of a real American Epic. In all aspects of epic poetry your work is distinguished; in particular, your power of interweaving external nature with incident ranks you with the best."—*Richard G. Moulton.*

THE QUEST

(*Complete Collected Lyrics*)

"John G. Neihardt, author of the American epic, 'The Song of Hugh Glass,' has selected poems for a new volume from three former collections of lyrics—'A Bundle of Myrrh' (1907), 'Man-Song' (1909) and 'The Stranger at the Gate' (1912). The poems that have been most widely read in these volumes are published together with new poems under the title 'The Quest.' To realize the scope, the power and promise of American lyric poetry it is necessary to know the work of John G. Neihardt. Here are no borrowings, no mimicking of other poets, but personal vision, fire and the fruit of experience."—*Review of Reviews.*

"Out of the great corn land he has drawn the best of his poetry. His imagination is luxuriant with the wealth and sun-

drowsy with the heat of those vast plains. The moulding touch of environment, making almost everywhere for beauty, normality and strength, is evident in all his work. In a community preoccupied with almost anything but poetry, he was made early to feel 'the sin of being different'; but this has not led him to vainglorious and romantic indulgence in that sin. He has not said with Francis Thompson: 'I hang 'mid men my needless head, and my fruit is dreams as theirs is bread.' On the contrary, when he discovered himself 'doomed to be poet forever' he 'longed to be only a man,' 'with the cosmic curtains drawn.' But this natural revolt has passed away, and we see the poet quite simply claiming his place among men, without timidity and without bluster. This is a triumph in self-mastery almost as rare and difficult as any of Mr. Neihardt's triumphs in his art. As a consequence of it, we see the poet everywhere completing the man and the man strengthening the poet, so that in his wildest insurgency there is always a strong back pull toward normality—a core of quiet at the cyclone's heart. . . . A group of brilliant lyrics that throb from end to end with a strange music and startle one broad awake with flaming metaphors."—*Odell Shepard in The Dial.*

"Contains lyrics that have not been equalled by any modern poet."—*New York Times.*

"There is a rugged Saxon strength and a vigorous originality in the poetry of John G. Neihardt that place him in the very front rank of American poets."—*The Literary Digest.*

"One thing at least is established beyond the likelihood of controversy—the author's right to be ranked among the foremost poets of this generation."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

"John G. Neihardt is a poet unqualified unless it be by the adjective 'great'. . . . A volume of poems by John G. Neihardt is always an event, for he is one of the great ones of this generation."—*San Francisco Call.*

"He is already with the English poets, and one can say no more."—*Bliss Carman.*

"The wizardry of words, the delicacy of sentiment and the daring originality in almost every poem of this collection place Mr. Neihardt among the poets whose works are decidedly contributions to literature. He is master of the unusual."—*Boston Herald.*

"Out of a vague and fumbling literature such poems as these come forth confident and clear. . . . John G. Neihardt is cer-

tainly one of the most distinctive poets of America.—*Chicago Evening Post.*

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"Truly this poet has extraordinary powers."—*William Stanley Braithwaite in The Bookman.*

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